



WRESTLING, ARCHERY, AND HORSE RACING IN BURYATIA:  
TRADITIONAL SPORTS COMPETITIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

By

Stefan Krist


RECOMMENDED:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Brian Kassof, Ph.D.


  
\_\_\_\_\_  
David Koester, Ph.D.

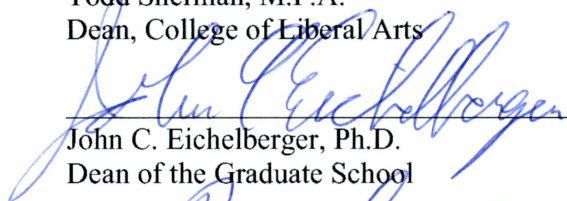
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Patrick Plattet, Ph.D.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Peter Schweitzer, Ph.D.  
Advisory Committee Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ben Potter, Ph.D.  
Chair, Department of Anthropology

APPROVED:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Sherman, M.F.A.  
Dean, College of Liberal Arts

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
John C. Eichelberger, Ph.D.  
Dean of the Graduate School

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



WRESTLING, ARCHERY, AND HORSE RACING IN BURYATIA:  
TRADITIONAL SPORTS COMPETITIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

A  
DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty  
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By  
Stefan Krist, M.A.

Fairbanks, Alaska

December 2015

## ABSTRACT

Sporting activities are examined in order to better understand a society's general socio-economic and political changes. The two basic research questions are the following:

- (1) Which economic, social, political, and cultural changes in and of the Buryat society were and are reflected in Buryat traditional sports?
- (2) How far and in which ways did and do Buryat traditional sports and the people engaged in them contribute to social change?

Anthropological studies of play, games, and sport—an overview of which is presented in Chapter 1—have revealed that sports are closely linked and tightly entangled with the cultures and societies, in which they are performed. Thus, many features, values, world views, normative demands, and rules, effective in a society in general, are reflected by the sports engaged in by its members. Therefore changes observed in sports often reflect changes in society. Moreover, changes in society are often more readily apparent in sports than in other social spheres. This is because the social action a sport competition constitutes is limited in its range of time, space, number of acting persons and established rules. These limitations let it reveal the values, norms, rules, and power relations that operate a society much clearer than other, less limited social actions. In addition, a large portion of the research on games and sports shows that sports not only *reflect*, but have the capacity in themselves to create new values and behavioral patterns, thus can *produce* social change.

The results of this study verify all these social properties and capacities of sports by using the traditional sporting activities of the Buryats as an example case. Chapter 2 provides the necessary background knowledge about the history of the Buryats. Chapters 3–5 outline the main features and the historical development of the three age-old traditional Buryat sports, *bukhe barildaan* (wrestling), *sur kharbaan* (archery), and *mori urildaan* (horse racing). Chapter 6 outlines the main characteristics and historical developments of the Buryat national holidays *Eryn gurban naadan* and *Surkharban*, during which competitions in these sports constitute the central activities. All these chapters, i.e. Chapters 3–6, describe the development from the sports' and festivals' ancient origins over their various utilizations by changing political and religious leaders to the present commixture of simultaneously re-traditionalizing and modernizing them.



The analysis of these sports' rules, techniques, tactics, equipment, etc., and how they have changed over the course of time as well as how has changed, where, when, by whom and how they were organized, sheds clear light on historic and present socio-economic, political, and spiritual processes in Buryat society. Changing political leadership (from tribal chieftains over Tsarist rule, Soviet power, early post-Soviet liberality to today's omnipotence of Putin's party "United Russia") and respective ideologies, varying religious affiliations (shamanism, Buddhism, Soviet communist ersatz religion, and the post-Soviet stormy revivals of shamanism and Buddhism), changing gender relations (from a male dominated society to a more emancipated one and back again), changing values and normative demands (such as what garb athletes have to wear)—all that and more can be detected and determined in how in particular the competitions and festivals were and are carried out.

That Buryat sport competitions and festivals themselves contribute to the production of social change is shown by their deliberate re-traditionalization and their re-embedding in religious rituals in the post-Soviet period. Due to massive support from the Buddhist clergy as well as from individual shamans, the three traditional sports have again become closely linked with Buryat practices of Buddhism and shamanism. Thus, because of their great popularity, these sports have vividly contributed to the post-Soviet revival and still ongoing flourishing of these two religions among them. The deliberate re-traditionalization of these sports supports a new arousing pride of being Buryat or, in other words, a re-construction of a Buryat national identity. Thus, Buryat traditional sports prove sports' capacity of indicating as well as actively contributing to social change.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	Page
<i>SIGNATURE PAGE</i> .....	i
<i>TITLE PAGE</i> .....	iii
<i>ABSTRACT</i> .....	v
<i>TABLE OF CONTENTS</i> .....	vii
<i>LIST OF TABLES</i> .....	xi
<i>NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION</i> .....	xiii
<i>PREFACE</i> .....	xv
 <b>Introduction:</b> .....	 <b>1</b>
The Buryats and their traditional sports .....	1
Hypotheses and research questions .....	2
Research methods .....	6
Chapter breakdown .....	8
Contributions to pertinent research and current discourses .....	10
 <b>Chapter 1:</b>	
<b>The Anthropology of Sports: A Historical Overview</b> .....	<b>13</b>
How we move (Body cultures) .....	14
Why we play .....	16
Play is free .....	21
Culture is played .....	23
What is play? .....	26
Sports anthropology: from a jump start to lagging behind .....	36
Anthropologists catch up .....	41
Important relevant contemporary themes, theories, and debates .....	44
<i>Human play versus animal play</i> .....	44

<i>Play versus work</i> .....	46
<i>Fun versus fight (Definition of sport)</i> .....	49
<i>Neo-evolutionist approaches and their critics</i> .....	54
<i>Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches</i> .....	55
<i>Functionalist approaches</i> .....	57
<i>Sports and (spi)rituality, magic, cult, and religion</i> .....	66
<i>Sports as a mirror of society</i> .....	73
<i>Symbolic anthropology</i> .....	76
<i>Body cultures' comeback</i> .....	78

## **Chapter 2:**

<b>Between East and West: History of the Buryats</b> .....	<b>89</b>
Geographical overview of the Baikal region .....	89
<i>Natural Environment</i> .....	89
<i>Population</i> .....	91
<i>Economy</i> .....	93
History of the Baikal region and the Buryats.....	94
<i>Prehistory (ca. 300,000 – 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE)</i> .....	94
<i>Steppe empires (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE – 14<sup>th</sup> century CE)</i> .....	95
<i>The Baikal region in the time of the early steppe empires</i> .....	100
<i>The Kurykan Culture (6th – 11th century CE) and the early stage of Buryat history</i> ..	100
<i>The Mongolian period (10<sup>th</sup> – mid-17<sup>th</sup> century)</i> .....	109
<i>The Tsarist period (17<sup>th</sup> – early-20<sup>th</sup> century)</i> .....	115
<i>The Russian conquest of the Baikal region</i> .....	115
<i>The Baikal region and the Buryats under Tsarist rule</i> .....	123
<i>The Soviet period (1921 – 1991)</i> .....	143
<i>The post-Soviet period (1991 – present)</i> .....	156

## **Chapter 3:**

<b><i>Bukhe barildaan—Buryat Wrestling</i></b> .....	<b>161</b>
<i>Magic and military roots</i> .....	161

Political utilizations of the past.....	167
Post-Soviet developments.....	170

#### **Chapter 4:**

<b><i>Sur kharbaan—Buryat Archery</i> .....</b>	<b>177</b>
Buryat bows and arrows.....	177
Buryat real, mythical, and ritual archery .....	187
Buryat sportive archery .....	200
<i>Buryat archery competitions in the pre-Soviet period</i> .....	200
<i>Archery among the Buryats in the Soviet period</i> .....	206
<i>Archery among the Buryats in the post-Soviet period</i> .....	215

#### **Chapter 5:**

<b><i>Mori urildaan—Buryat Horse Races</i>.....</b>	<b>225</b>
Horses in Buryat life .....	225
<i>Mori urildaan—Buryat horse races</i> .....	229

#### **Chapter 6:**

<b>The Buryat Traditional Sports Holidays .....</b>	<b>239</b>
The origin of the ‘three games of men’ .....	240
The ‘three games of men’ in former times (pre-Soviet and Soviet period) .....	243
The ‘three games of men’ today (post-Soviet period) .....	253

#### **Discussion, Results, and Conclusions:**

<b>Buryat Sports as a Mirror of Society and a Means for Social Change.....</b>	<b>265</b>
Brief chapter summaries .....	265
Results and analyses .....	272
<i>About the origins and history of the ‘three games of men’</i> .....	272
<i>About the ‘three games of men’ as a mirror of society</i> .....	277
<i>About the social functions of the ‘three games of men’</i> .....	284
<i>Religious (cultic-magic) functions</i> .....	284

<i>Military functions .....</i>	285
<i>Economic functions .....</i>	285
<i>Utilizations for promoting ideologies.....</i>	285
<i>Identity constructing and identity strengthening functions .....</i>	286
<i>Community strengthening functions.....</i>	288
<i>Health promoting functions.....</i>	288
<i>Educational functions.....</i>	289
<i>Life enhancing function.....</i>	289
Conclusions.....	290
<b>References:.....</b>	<b>293</b>

## *LIST OF TABLES*

	Page
Table 1: Classification of Games by Roger Caillois.....	30



### *NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION*

In the text of this dissertation, for the transliteration of Russian, Buryat, and Mongolian words, I follow the guidelines of the United States Board on Geographic Names for the romanization of Russian. I have made a few exceptions in cases where spellings at variance with these guidelines have become much more common and widely accepted in the scholarly literature. Prominent examples include ‘Buryatia’ instead of ‘Buryatiya’ and ‘Soviet’ instead of ‘Sovet’. However, in the bibliographical entries I strictly follow the United States Board on Geographic Names’ guidelines for all terms, in order to be consistent and to ensure that the cited sources can be found. As regards the three letters used in the Buryat Cyrillic alphabet in addition to the letters of the Russian Cyrillic alphabet, I transliterate them in accordance with the most widespread fashion in scholarly literature as follows: Ö, ö for *Ө, ө*; Ü, ü for *У, у*; and H, h for *Х, х*.





## *PREFACE*

Now that I have finally completed this dissertation, I feel nostalgia coming over me and would like to recall, and share with my readers, how it all started. The genesis of my interest was nothing special in the beginning: as a boy, like many other boys and many girls too, I was generally interested in sports as a participant and as a spectator. Early on, I also was interested in foreign cultures. Thus, after I graduated from the *gymnasium* (which is what we call an Austrian high school), I began to study cultural anthropology at the University of Vienna. Like many of my fellow students, I soon became a radical leftist dreaming of a better, more just, that is, egalitarian (communist or socialist) society. That was why I became interested in how life was—and was *changing*—in the Soviet Union, after Mr. Gorbachev came into power. Therefore I began learning Russian and frequently traveled to Russia. My first trip was in 1989, two years before the end of the Soviet Union.

In 1994, when I learned that the Buryats, a Siberian indigenous ethnic group of which I had hardly heard before, have a national holiday in which their traditional sports hold center stage, all my interests seemed to perfectly come together. Naturally, I chose to study these sports festivals. But what kept me doing this for more than two decades? First and foremost, I kept doing at it because my fascination with the multifaceted social action a Buryat national sports holiday constitutes never faded, but only increased the more I learned. The second, more rational and scientific, or more precisely, sociopolitical, motivation has been—and still is—that I want to draw attention to both the diversity of traditional sports, and the close connection they have with people's lives, as opposed to modern Western sports' uniformity and prevalent obsession with breaking records.

Thus, this study's first purpose is to call attention to traditional, non-Western, non-professional sports, and therefore draw attention to the diversity of cultures in general. Second, I call for an analysis of sports as a mirror of general cultural traits and characteristics prevalent in societies; in other words, I endorse utilizing not only the practice, but also the study of sports for improving human mutual understanding and thus using it for the creation of a more peaceful world.

Conducting this study has been a long and sometimes difficult process. But I do not regret anything. It made me see not only many times my ‘field,’ the Republic of Buryatia and neighboring areas in Russia and Mongolia, but also other places in the world—Moscow, St. Petersburg, Budapest, Cambridge, Fairbanks, etc.—and to meet inspiring and wonderful people in all these places. Many of them helped me with my studies in one way or another. In what follows I will express my gratitude to many of them, but to mention all of them would be impossible, as this would become a list too long for my readers to endure. I apologize to all who would deserve to be mentioned here too, but for this sole reason cannot. Be sure that I have not forgotten your help and that I am very grateful to all of you!

The first Buryat I became acquainted with—at some point in the early 1990s—was Dr. Tsypylma Dariyeva who, back then, was a graduate student at the Free University of Berlin. I am very grateful to her, because she set up the contact for me with the Buryat Institute of Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Ulan-Ude, the capital of Buryatia, and arranged that I would be officially invited to visit this institute and conduct my first field research in Buryatia in the summer of 1996. However, before I went there, I spent half a year in St. Petersburg, where I had the privilege of enjoying supervision from professors Aleksandr V. Gadlo and Valerian A. Kozmin. At this time I also met with Dr. Natal’ya Zhukovskaya from the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, who then, as well as several times later, shared some of her enormous knowledge about the history and ethnography of the Buryats with me. I am truly thankful to these Russian colleagues for their guidance and support in this early stage of my journey.

Of the numerous scholars whom I met in Ulan-Ude during my thirteen research stays there, from 1996 to 2015, I want to express my gratitude especially to the anthropologists Dr. Tat’yana D. Skrynnikova, to the art historian Dr. Inessa I. Soktoyeva, to the sinologist and historian Professor Nikolay V. Abayev, and to the sports historian Vladimir A. Fomin. I name these four also as representatives of the many other scholars I had the pleasure to meet in Ulan-Ude. I owe them great portions of my knowledge of Buryat history and culture, for which I am deeply thankful.

I am also thankful to countless people for the help and assistance in my daily life in Buryatia in the course of my stays. As representatives of them, I should first name Maksim Koslov, who first rented me a room in his apartment in Ulan-Ude, and temporarily even his whole apartment

during my first and second visits and provided me with valuable hints for survival in town. Second, I want to honor the writer Munko Tsydenov, who, two weeks after I had arrived for my first visit in Buryatia in 1996, while hardly knowing me, took me to the taylagan ritual of his kin group. Munko passed away about ten years before the writing of this dissertation, and thus, cannot read this appreciation of him. Nonetheless I feel deeply obliged to thank him for his years-long friendship. Two other friends from Ulan-Ude whom I want to thank for their manifold help in daily life, but also for sharing their truly encyclopedic knowledge about Buryatia, Siberia, Russia, and the world and his brother with me, are the local historian, collector, and publicist, Viktor Kharitonov, and the painter and historian Bair Taysayev. I also want to express very special thanks to another Buryat artist: blacksmith Radna Sanzhitov, whose large family and their place in Ulan-Ude became a second home for me. Deep gratitude also goes to philologist Professor Anatoliy S. Karpov and sports scientist Dr. Maksim Aksënov of the Buryat State University, who for many years provided me with help and assistance in administrative and other matters, for which, and also for their friendship, I am very thankful.

In my journey to this degree, three other stations in addition to Buryatia, St. Petersburg, and Moscow were very important. The first was Cambridge, England. I am very thankful to Professor Caroline Humphrey, who made my very inspiring, three-month stay at the university in 1997 possible and who shared her deep knowledge about the Buryats' and Mongols' history and culture with me. The second was Budapest, where I, in the beginning of this millennium, studied for several years at the Department for Inner Asian Studies of the Eötvös Loránd University. Of the truly outstanding scientists there, from whom I learned immensely, I am especially grateful to the late professor Katalin Uray-Kőhalmi, who had been just wonderful, both as a scholar and a person, and to professor Ágnes Birtalan, from whose deep knowledge and never-ending scientific curiosity I have learned enormously and still continue to learn. The last stop on my journey has been the university to whose faculty I present this thesis. I am first and foremost thankful to Professor Peter Schweitzer, who has brought me to this cold hell, of which I am however not miffed about, because the conditions here definitely help one to stay focused on their goals. In addition to Peter, I am equally thankful to my three other committee members, professors David Koester, Patrick Plattet, and Brian Kassof, whose constructive criticism and valuable comments have helped me a lot in my writing of this thesis. The same holds true for the tutors of the Writing Center, whose help was crucial, because English after all is still a foreign

language to me. Without their help this thesis would not be legible. Thus, in behalf of my readers I thank them very much for their excellent work.

Of the countless people who helped me to not only survive in Fairbanks, but to make my stay a joyful one, and thus enabled me to proceed in my work on this thesis and to finally finish it, I first want to thank my fellow graduate students at the Department of Anthropology. I would especially like to express my thankfulness to Konstantine Triambelas, with whom I had so many inspiring conversations at the department, at the pub, elsewhere in Fairbanks, and on Skype after he graduated and left for warmer climates. Out of the many employees of the university who helped me in administrative and other matters, I want to thank Amber McKirgan, the director of the university's 'greenhouse crew.' Working under her supervision in the greenhouse, the gardens, and flower beds on campus saved me from going broke and thus from being forced to discontinue the PhD program. It was fulfilling, and often hard, work that refreshed my mind for further work on this thesis. I doubt that I would have ever finished it without that regular 'distraction.'

I definitely would not have been able to finish this thesis—or even start it—without its protagonists: the sportsmen and sportswomen of Buryatia. In place of the plethora of them who let me closely watch their actions and provided me with crucial information, I want to specifically thank two of my key informants among them: Shagdar Aleksandrovich Khazagayev and Tsyren-Dorzhi Namdakovich Magakov, both outstanding Buryat archers and very knowledgeable and extremely helpful persons. Very much of what follows in the next 300 pages, I only could write due to their and the other athletes' help. With the information I received from them, as with all other sources, I hope that I have used the information properly. I worked with the utmost accuracy to which I was able. For any mistakes I have nonetheless made, I take full responsibility.

It would also have been impossible to write this thesis without the endless help and support of my parents. To express the dimensions of my feelings of gratitude to them exceeds the capacity of written language, but, I am confident, they know.

## **Introduction:**

Sports are a universal human phenomenon that encompass major social institutions worldwide, and therefore have considerable effect on people's lives. Sporting activities, both competitive and recreational, affect many spheres of society, ranging from politics and economics to community building, from the promotion of health and well-being to religious and spiritual life. Hence, using sports to examine socio-economic and political changes can be very useful. This is what this study undertakes. Its aim is not only to learn how Buryat sportspeople deal with new influences and processes of political, economic, and social change, but the whole of Buryat society as well.

### **The Buryats and their traditional sports**

The Buryats are the numerically largest indigenous ethnic group of Siberia. Today the majority of the approximately 450,000 Buryats live in the Republic of Buryatia, a semi-autonomous republic within the Russian Federation situated at its border with Mongolia. The most distinguishing geographical feature and natural landmark of the region is Lake Baikal, the deepest and most water-rich lake on earth, which stretches from its south-western end near the Mongolian border about four-hundred miles to the north-east. The Buryats reside upon the steppe lands to the west, south, and east of the lake.

The Buryats belong to the Mongolian language family, but came under Russian control in the seventeenth century. Subsequently, Russian influence considerably altered their life in many ways. However, not much changed in their spiritual and religious lives. The majority of the Buryats never converted to Russian Orthodoxy, but adhered to either their primordial shamanistic beliefs, to Tibetan Buddhism, or, most often in fact, to both. Neither did their change from a nomadic to a sedentary mode of life completely erase the nomadic features of their culture.

Among the Buryats, their age-old traditional “three games of men”—wrestling, archery, and horse racing—have always been very popular. In old times, competitions in these three games

accompanied shamanistic sacrificial ceremonies. The games, like the sacrificed animal, were considered a gift presented to the gods and spirits in order to win their favor. This use of the games for a symbolic, ritualistic communication between men and the divine also was adopted by the Buddhist clergy. Following the (partial) conversion of the majority of the Buryats to Buddhism in the first decades of the eighteenth century, the competitions have accompanied Buddhist sacramental ceremonies. Reports from the nineteenth century also show that the Tsarist administration made use of the games. During the Soviet period, distinct Buryat customary features were curtailed and the holidays' religious parts were prohibited. Instead, international rules were adopted for the sports and secularized sports holidays, adorned with various state and party propaganda features, were organized.

The post-Soviet years brought a reversal of this process leading to a re-traditionalization of the holidays in general and of the sports in particular. Today, competitors in national Buryat wrestling once again fight with traditional waist belts, and in archery, much attention is paid to the correct observance of traditional rules and settings. For instance, archers are urged to use traditional wooden bows and to wear a traditional Buryat garb coat. An ongoing trend in horse races towards longer and longer distances represents a step-by-step approximation of former marathon-like racing distances, which were typically run by the small but indefatigable Buryat steppe horses. The most striking feature of this re-traditionalization process, however, constitutes the re-embedding of the games into religious contexts. Today the 'Three Games of Men' again accompany shamanistic sacrificial rituals and, in greater number, various Buddhist ceremonies and celebrations. Yet, at the same time they have also become commercialized mega-events organized in an absolutely modern way, which includes sponsoring by private companies, mass-media reporting, hip fringe events, modern consumer goods given as prizes, and so forth.

## **Hypotheses and research questions**

From a general theoretical perspective this study examines whether the case of the traditional sporting activities of the people of Buryatia verifies two hypotheses:

- (1) changes in sports *reflect* changes in society;
- (2) sports themselves *produce* changes in society.

These two hypotheses derive from a review of the main approaches, concepts, and theories developed in the study of sports as a social phenomenon.

In more detail, the first of these two hypotheses means that sports have the quality and capability to reflect the values, world views, normative demands, and rules that are effective in a society in general. This is because sports are not separated, but closely linked and tightly entangled with the cultures and societies, in which they are performed. Therefore sports also reflect changes in society, that is, social change. I furthermore argue that sports' quality of this kind is particularly high because of the specific character of the social action a sporting competition constitutes. It is always limited in its range of time, space, number of participants and established rules. It most often lasts for a precisely settled duration, or has at least a determined beginning and ending. It is always held on a field (or a court, a track, a course, etc.), the shape and size of which has been set in advance. The number of players is either always the same or has been fixed before the beginning of each game. In addition, the number of rules as well as their complexity has to be limited, otherwise their observance, which is an indispensable condition of every game, would not be guaranteed. A social action of this kind—i.e. one significantly and distinctly limited in various ways—I conclude, reveals the values, norms, and rules that operate a society in general much better than other, less limited social actions, because due to those various limits, they appear in much more pure, i.e. unmixed, undisturbed and undistorted forms. Thus, also *changes* ongoing in a society at large are more, and often earlier, apparent in sports than in other contexts; hence sports are often very reliable indicators of social change.

The second hypothesis, that sports can *produce* changes in society, rests mainly upon two facts. First, a constitutive property of any game is that it is a *free* activity: every game, though limited and restricted by rules, inevitably has to concede to its players a certain level of freedom of decision and of creative leeway, otherwise nothing could be meaningfully played and no competition would be possible. Second, in sports this “relative *individual* freedom” is typically combined with strong “*collective* experiences,”<sup>1</sup> a combination which has the potential to create new behavioral patterns and new values among *groups* of people, including large ones, even whole nations. Often such processes form new social identities, thus, *shape culture*. Dutch

---

<sup>1</sup> Stefan Krist, “Where Going Back is a Step Forward: The Re-Traditionalising of Sport Games in Post-Soviet Buriatia,” *Sibirica* 4, 1 (2004): 111.



historian Johan Huizinga therefore rightly concluded that *play* and *culture* not only mutually influence each other, but even emerge in and from each other;<sup>2</sup> in other words, they are just two sides of the same coin. Thus, sports can produce changes in society.

As regards the first hypothesis, this study proves that general political, economic, social and cultural developments, changes and upheavals did and do influence where, when, by whom, and how Buryat sport competitions were and are carried out. It furthermore detects which social and cultural features of Buryat society, and in particular which values, normative demands and rules operating in the society at large, were and are reflected in its traditional sports.

As regards the second hypothesis, the study focuses for its testing mainly on developments in the post-Soviet period. The collapse of the Soviet Union had an invasive impact on people's lives everywhere in its former realm. Buryatia was and is no exception. Buryat society underwent and still experiences profound changes affecting all spheres of life, including sporting activities. That sports not only reflect these changes, but that Buryat sportspeople have actively contributed to them, is shown in this study.

In addition to the verification of these two hypotheses, this study answers a number of research questions which can be summarized in three main groups:

- (1) questions regarding the *origin* and *history* of the three traditional Buryat sports and their sports holidays;
- (2) questions regarding their capacity of being a *mirror of society*;
- (3) questions regarding the *social functions* of these sports and holidays.

These groups are of course not demarcated from each other, but widely overlap, because phenomena belonging to the second and third groups have an origin and a history too and are often interrelated. The questions' grouping in this way only served me to keep my mind in the research process organized in *one* possible way, and this it should serve for my readers. There would, of course, be other possible ways to categorize the research questions this study sought to answer, but any categories I can think of would overlap as well. Thus, no matter, how one would group the questions, in any case one needs to keep in mind their interconnectedness. The grouping just helps to treat them in the consecutive text a dissertation constitutes.

As regards the Buryat sports' *origin* and *history*, this study answers the following questions:

- What are the origins of the three Buryat sport competitions and of their sports holidays?

---

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 23.

- How did they change in the course of history and what were the reasons for these changes?
- How did and do social, political, economic, and cultural changes in society affect the sports and holidays?
- Which role did and do magic, cults, and religions play in these processes, and in particular religious institutions and leaders? Why do the Buddhist clergy today so strongly promote the competitions?
- How did the global assertion of market economy and the significantly increased mobility of people, information, thoughts, and goods influence the sporting activities of the Buryats in the post-Soviet period?

Viewing these Buryat sports as a *mirror of Buryat society*, the following questions could be answered:

- Which social and cultural features of Buryat society, and in particular which values, world views, normative demands and rules operating the society in general were and are reflected in the holidays and competitions and how?
- How were and are kinship, power, ethnic, and class relations reflected in them and how did that change over time?
- What kind of gender relations existed and exist in traditional Buryat sporting activities and do they reflect the corresponding developments in society in general?
- Which conflicts, problems, and tensions are reflected in the competitions and holidays?
- How do specific social, economic, political, and cultural conditions affect these sports and the ways they are conducted? Are, for instance, Buryat wrestling styles and tactics distinctly different from those of wrestlers from other societies?
- How does the great importance which horses had for the (former nomadic) Buryats and their great admiration of them affect their equestrian sports?
- How are recent post-Soviet and global developments reflected in the sports and holidays? Did and do, for instance, the various economic crises directly affect them, and if so, how?

Concerning the Buryat traditional sports' *social functions*, the study answers first the following basic question:

- Which social, economic, ideological, political, communicative, pedagogical, health-promoting, and other functions and utilizations of the holidays and competitions can be detected?

In particular answers to the following questions could be found:

- Which roles do the sports and the holidays play in identity construction processes and which kinds of identities in particular are constructed and/or supported by them?
- How were and are the sports holidays exploited by political rulers and religious leaders?
- Do these sports provide possibilities for individuals or groups to enhance their lives, for instance, for improving social status, personal health or broadening one's network of relations?
- What in particular are the pedagogical and socializing functions these sports had and have, and did they change in time?
- To what extent and in which ways have recent (post-Soviet and global) developments influenced and changed the various utilizations of these sports?

## **Research methods**

A mixed methods approach was applied, which relies on a well-elaborated and, for social anthropological research purposes, established set of both data collecting and analyzing tools, for investigating these questions.

The main body of data for this study derives from ethnographic fieldwork. Participant observation, documented in my field notes, and photographs and videos taken by me, and interviews I carried out with key informants, provide the main body of the primary data. Studies in libraries, museums, and private collections provide the body of secondary sources. Altogether the used data can be itemized and categorized as follows:

- data collected during field work:
  - field notes about:
    - observations at Buryat sport competitions;
    - conversations with Buryat sportsmen and sportswomen;

- conversations with local experts: trainers, officials, sport scientists, historians, ethnographers, journalists, etc.;
  - other research topic related occasions, incidents, experiences, communications, etc.;
- recorded interviews with key informants;
- photographs and video recordings taken at sports holidays, competitions, during interviews, in museums, and at other places and occasions connected with this research;
- information from local media: newspaper articles, radio and TV broadcasts;
- statistical data from governmental departments;
- consulted literature:
  - scholarly literature: monographs, book chapters, journal articles, etc.;
  - folk literature: chronicles, epics, tales, legends, etc.;
  - journalistic literature: newspaper articles, popular science books, etc.;
  - functional literature: programs of events, competition rules, administrative orders, inscriptions, etc.;
  - grey literature: club magazines, websites, social media, etc.;
- inspected and documented artifacts of material culture:
  - sports equipment and people's and horses' appearance: wrestling boots, wrestlers' waist belts, bows, arrows, archery targets, saddles, bridles, traditional hats and costumes, straps woven into horses' tails and manes, etc.;
  - items of the sport festivals' infrastructure and accouterment: flags, guidons, banners, signboards, stages, tribunes, barriers, microphones, loudspeakers, officials' and umpires' desks, winners' podiums, kiosks, snack stalls, etc.;
- viewed and documented artworks:
  - visual arts: petroglyphs, paintings, drawings, book illustrations, sculptures, hand woven horse hair carpets, etc.;
  - performing arts: opening ceremonies, parades, dances, ballets, etc.

Most of this data has been collected during field work. Since 1996, I have undertaken fourteen research trips to the Republic of Buryatia, the Irkutsk Province, the Trans-Baikal Territory, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), St. Petersburg, and Mongolia. During these trips I

visited about 30 traditional Buryat sports holidays. I met with numerous Buryat sportspeople, influential officials, and experts in various fields related to Buryat sports. As regards the consulted literature, I purchased a vast amount of relevant books in bookstores of Ulan-Ude, Irkutsk, St. Petersburg, Moscow, and elsewhere, and did intensive work in libraries in Ulan-Ude, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Cambridge (U.K.), Budapest (Hungary), Vienna (Austria), and Fairbanks (Alaska), and intensively used interlibrary loan services in both North America and Europe.

Concerning the collected ethnographic data, the primary focus has been on participant observation. Interviews with key informants were, as appropriate in socio-cultural anthropology, open-ended and semi-structured. As for the artifacts of material culture, I have photographed both objects in use—during visits of Buryat sport events—and objects already stored in museums. I have also purchased an antique traditional Buryat bow, with which I myself have sometimes practiced archery; thus I am personally familiar with the usage of traditional Buryat bows. I have collected photographs and originals of art works depicting scenes of Buryat sports holidays, because they can be used in a twofold way: first, as historical sources of how the competitions and holidays were carried out at the times the artworks were produced, and second, as proofs of the games' and holidays' persistent importance for the Buryat society throughout history.

In the analysis, carried out after the fieldwork and after the review and examination of the literature, all collected data has been compared and contrasted against each other and analyzed by applying theoretical concepts suitable for answering the posed research questions.

This research followed the University of Alaska Fairbanks Institutional Review Board policy governing human subjects research (Protocol #10-23, issued May 4, 2010).

## **Chapter breakdown**

This dissertation presents the outcome of my research. It consists of six chapters and a concluding section.

Chapter 1, “The Anthropology of Sports: A Historical Overview”, provides an overview of the history of theory making about play and sports, focusing on the latter. Although it provides

an overview of all influential theories, approaches, and concepts, it highlights in particular the socio-cultural anthropological contributions, which I consider most applicable for this study.

One of them is German sport anthropologist Henning Eichberg's criticism of the—at least until fairly recently—widespread usage of the notion of “sport” mostly in its singular, even when referring to more than one particular sport. When looking beyond the somewhat small realm of Western professional sports—as this study does—it is obvious that people's movement and body cultures, and thus their plays, games and sports, have always been many and were very diverse. Therefore Eichberg correctly concludes that they “are to be understood as a cultural plural.”<sup>3</sup> I agree with him and therefore use the notion in almost all cases in its plural—“sports”.

Chapter 2, “Between East and West: History of the Buryats”, provides an outline of the history of the Buryats with a particular focus on the main characteristics of their traditional culture and on how and why they have changed over time. It constitutes a piece of *historical anthropology* in that it follows this mixed method's main goal, to “put indigenous peoples as *active agents* into their histories.”<sup>4</sup> The chapter's function is to provide the reader with the necessary historical, cultural, and ethnographic background knowledge for understanding the following chapters.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 outline the origin and historical developments of the three sports, Buryat wrestling, Buryat archery, and Buryat horse racing. They contain detailed descriptions of how these sports are played: their characteristics, their rules, the used equipments, as well as the settings of the competitions. They also describe in which spheres of Buryat culture these sports are reflected—e.g. in literature—and on which social and other spheres of Buryat life they had, and still have, an impact—e.g. on warfare and hunting.

Chapter 6, “The Buryat Traditional Sports Holidays”, describes the historical development of the Buryat sports holidays *Eryn gurban naadan*, which basically consist of competitions in the three, in Chapters 3–5 described sports. These holidays were originally part of shamanistic sacrificial rituals, later adopted by the Buddhist clergy, then utilized by Tsarist and Soviet authorities, the latter introducing a new name for the holiday: *Surkharban*. In the post-Soviet

---

<sup>3</sup> Henning Eichberg, “Olympische und andere Bewegungskulturen—Über Exklusion, Anerkennung und Fest,” in *Sport bewegt Europa. Beiträge zur interkulturellen Verständigung*, ed. Diethelm Blecking and Petra Gieß-Stüber (Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag Hohengehren, 2006), 105, translation mine. See below, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Shepard Krech III., “Ethnohistory,” in *The Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, ed. David Levinson and Melvin Ember, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1996), 428, italics mine.

period the holidays have been re-embedded into shamanistic and—to a greater extent—Buddhist rituals and ceremonial practices.

The concluding chapter, “Discussion, Results, and Conclusions—Buryat Sports as a Mirror of Society and a Means for Social Change”, first provides brief chapter summaries and then presents answers to the particular research questions raised above and then summarizes by which means the case of the Buryats’ traditional sports and their traditional sports holidays support the two postulated hypotheses, that changes in sports *reflect* changes in society, and that sports themselves can *produce* changes in society.

### **Contributions to pertinent research and current discourses**

Other studies about Buryat sports carried out and published so far were predominantly descriptive and/or focused mainly on the question of these sports’ origin and their linkage with Buryat-Mongolian mythology, whereas to their social, economic, and political functions, qualities and capabilities has received considerably less attention. This study seeks to fill this gap. In particular, it contributes to the discourse on mixed, hybrid, or even contradictory identities people, and even active agents in the construction of such identities, can have, as Buryat sports today are characterized by a striking commixture of re-traditionalization and modernization.

Furthermore, this study provides a proof that the seemingly unified appearance of sports created by the worldwide domination of reporting on mainly the Western professional sports is little more than deceit. There is much more than what the Western world considers “sports.” There are many other, and very diverse, sports all over the world, of which the Buryat traditional sports are one exemplary case.

The study of this case also contributes to the filling of another research gap. In 2003, American sports sociologist Jay J. Coakley stated that “little is known about the relationships between sports and major world religions other than particular forms of Christianity.”<sup>5</sup> As this has not much changed since then, this study will contribute to filling of this research gap by presenting a case of a close relationship between sports and Buddhism.

---

<sup>5</sup> Jay J. Coakley, *Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 561.

The history and present state of the traditional Buryat sports are shining examples of the fact that social, economic, and political conditions that are characteristic for a particular society at a particular time are clearly reflected in the sports played in this society at that time. Therefore all changes in society at large are mirrored in its sports. In general, this study will focus on this notion, which anthropologists have pointed out for a long time, but which nonetheless has not become common knowledge.

In particular regards to social change, post-Soviet developments in the three traditional Buryat sports show that sports, or to be more precise, the people who actively engage in them—which includes the athletes themselves, but also organizers, functionaries, spectators, and sponsors—can trigger or even *produce* social change through their activities. This capability of sports is even less well-known than the one that sports often mirror social change. With this study I hope to raise awareness for both.





## Chapter 1:

### The Anthropology of Sports: A Historical Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the history of theory-making about play and sports, with a focus upon the latter. I will highlight in particular socio-cultural anthropological contributions and among them those I consider most applicable for this study.

Although it may seem sometimes questionable in these days of ubiquitous media reporting on *professional* sports, the activities of sports *in general* belong to the category of *play*. Therefore, to come to grips with sports, one first needs to understand what constitutes play. This, however, is a difficult task. It has become manifest—especially in anthropology—that “no consensus exists in its [i.e. play’s] definition.”<sup>6</sup> The activities subsumed under the notion of play are too flexible, multi-layered and complex, for there is nothing with which we cannot play or that cannot be turned into play, and as American physical educators Janet Harris and Roberta Park have rightly stated, “a person could probably play almost anyplace, and an individual might vacillate in and out of a state of playfulness during the course of almost any activity.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the ways we may and actually play, are infinite. Facing this, many scientists simply surrendered. American anthropologist Edward Norbeck gave voice to this in his Johan Huizinga Address at the first annual meeting of The Association of the Anthropological Study of Play (TAASP) in Detroit in 1975: “For the most part we have proceeded in our studies without defining play, assuming that everyone knows its meaning.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, scientists, including anthropologists, mostly had to admit their “apparent inability to define such terms as ‘play’, ‘games’ and ‘sport’ so that they can be operationally employed in a cross-cultural context” and their “failure to clearly establish the parameters of the [...] field under investigation.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Edward Norbeck, “The Study of Play—Johan Huizinga and Modern Anthropology,” in *The Study of Play: Problems and Prospects*, ed. David F. Lancy and Allan Tindall (West Point: Leisure Press, 1977), 19, addition mine.

<sup>7</sup> Janet C. Harris and Roberta J. Park, “Introduction to the Sociocultural Study of Play, Games, and Sports,” in *Play, Games and Sports in Cultural Contexts*, ed. Janet C. Harris and Roberta J. Park (Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1983), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Michael A. Salter, “Preface,” in *Play: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Michael A. Salter (West Point: Leisure Press, 1978), 3.

Sports constitute only a small section of this boundless playground but they too appear in a limitless variety. Furthermore, they were, and, as we all know, still are constantly changing; in other words, are constantly in *motion*—not only in the literal sense of the word but also, if not more, in its conceptual sense. As a consequence, an overview of the approaches and theories, developed and applied by scientists to investigate and analyze sports, cannot avoid moving as well. The narrative in this chapter will therefore, like the ball in a ball game, be driven by changing players (scientists) in changing ways (theories) and with changing equipment (research methods). Yet I will try to pursue a path that is usually taken by anybody who wants to learn a new sport. One starts with the most basic things one has to know and to understand about the game. From there one tries and practices more difficult and more complex movements and moves. Thus, one *step-by-step* increases one's skills and understanding of the game and how to play it. So, let us begin with the most basic feature of sportive activity: movement; more precisely: body movement.

### **How we move (Body cultures)**

In contrast to those of animals, human motor skills are for the most part not innate but have to be actively acquired. In fact, except for suckling at our mother's breast and the clasp reflex (Moro reflex) we have to *learn* all movements of our body and of its parts. We usually start with this already in the womb (kicking) but for the most part we learn them after birth from and, more importantly, we learn them within the context of other human beings. Those are, at first, most often, but not necessarily, our parents, siblings, and other close relatives. Later, we learn our body skills also from others, including professionals like teachers and trainers, but usually mostly from and together with our *play* mates. Thus, learning to move our body and to move with our body is firstly a *social* activity that is part of our *socialization*, and secondly it is accomplished in large part while we are *playing*.<sup>10</sup> In relation to my particular subject, i.e. to sports or sporting activities, this has two important consequences:

---

<sup>10</sup> Robert H. Kührer, "Das menschliche Spiel—seine Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten" (PhD diss., Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, 1979), 5.

- (1) It means that our *body techniques*, i.e. *how we move* our body or parts of it in order to achieve certain goals or under certain circumstances, including those in any sport, are *culturally determined* and *differentiated*. In his essay “Les techniques du corps”, first published in 1935, French anthropologist Marcel Mauss points out that

[t]he *body* is man’s first and most natural *instrument*. Or more accurately [...] man’s first and most natural technical object, and at the same time his first *technical means*, is his body.<sup>11</sup>

The usage of this *instrument* or *means* we learn, as Mauss convincingly argues further on, through education and, in particular, by imitating “actions that have succeeded, which he [man—child and adult alike] has seen successfully performed by people in whom he has confidence and who have authority over him.”<sup>12</sup> Thus “[t]he individual,” resumes Mauss, “borrows the series of movements of which he is composed from the action executed in front of him, or with him, by others.”<sup>13</sup> As a consequence the techniques of the human bodies differ more from culture to culture than from individual to individual. Mauss presents in his article a wealth of examples which clearly prove and, often quite amusingly, demonstrate this. Men and women from different cultures walk, run, swim, dance, eat, rest, sleep, take care of their body, and have sex in very different, clearly *culturally* molded, ways. ‘Body *culture*’ understood in this way thus means that there are at least as many *body* cultures as there are cultures. This *plurality* of body cultures is very important to note and needs to be kept in mind. It will become the key rationale of a theoretical and analytical concept particularly applicable for socio-cultural anthropological sport studies, but developed only recently, many decades after this ingenious French anthropologist had paved the way.

- (2) The way we learn our body skills means that even the very basic prerequisite of sportive activities, i.e. the ability to move our body—an ability which actual realizations, as we

---

<sup>11</sup> Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body,” in *Incorporations* (vol. 6 of *Zone*), ed. Jonathan Cary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone, 1992), 461, emphases mine. For the bibliographical reference of the original French publication see the bibliography.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 459, addition mine.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

just have seen, are mostly culturally molded—is closely linked with or even arises from play.

## Why we play

As stated above, it is very difficult to comprehend play in the totality to which the notion refers. This holds true, although for a long time many thinkers and scientists have been going into the matter trying to determine the nature of play and the reason(s) why humans (and higher animals) participate in play behavior.

Ancient Greek thinkers were the first of whom we know debated play. Socrates and Plato, who both were active wrestlers in their youth,<sup>14</sup> realized the usefulness of *children's* play for learning (and teaching) purposes. Socrates held the view that children should not be forced to learn but rather play should be used for making learning joyful for them. Plato principally agreed with Socrates, but was concerned with possible harmful repercussions to law and order, as children who have learned to change rules in a game may later, as adults, attempt to do so with the state order and or the social hierarchy too.<sup>15</sup> Aristotle reflected on the relationship between play and work, and between play and seriousness. He viewed play as a necessary recreational activity and realized that play and seriousness are not contradictory but complementary.<sup>16</sup> Philostratos viewed even the relationship between games and war in a similar way. For him, games were as much practice for war as war was for games.<sup>17</sup> We will see that these considerations of the classic Greek thinkers have been taken up again by other researchers later on.

This, however, took time. Although chariot races were extremely popular in the Late Antiquity, Roman and Byzantine authors surprisingly did not deeply reflect on play and sports. Neither did any scholar during the Middle Ages. The Christian ethic's hostile attitude towards

---

<sup>14</sup> Allen Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 23.

<sup>15</sup> Kevin J. Brehony, "Theories of Play," in *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society* (Advameg Inc., 2008, <http://www.faq.s.org/childhood/Th-W/Theories-of-Play.html>, accessed February 9, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Kühner, "Das menschliche Spiel," 44.

<sup>17</sup> Norbert Elias, "Die Genese des Sports als soziologisches Problem," in *Texte zur Soziologie des Sports. Sammlung fremdsprachiger Beiträge*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Kurt Hammerich and Klaus Heinemann (Schorndorf: Hofmann, 1979), 91.

anything joyful prevented anything other than adverse reactions to such ‘sinful’ activities like play and games. In the post-Reformation period this did not change. To the contrary, the Protestant work ethic may actually be viewed as the climax of the Christian anti-play attitude.<sup>18</sup> In general, a work versus play dichotomy and the higher valuation of the first of the two became prevalent in all Western (i.e. Christian) societies. Sciences and academia—two of those societies’ characteristic subcultures—were and are no exceptions. Thus, this fundamental cultural bias has also heavily influenced the study of play and related activities, and, logically, not to its benefit.<sup>19</sup>

A first consequence was that it was only in the Age of Enlightenment when the topic could be taken up again. English philosopher and physician John Locke followed, after more than two thousand years, the footsteps of Socrates and Plato: like them, he advocated in his work “*Some Thoughts Concerning Education*,” published in 1693, the use of play in education.<sup>20</sup> Another hundred years later, the German writer and philosopher of the Enlightenment Friedrich Schiller coined his famous sentence: “Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only human when he plays.”<sup>21</sup>

It took, however, a further eight decades before English philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer, who referred to Schiller, though not mentioning him by name, developed a first scientific theory of play. In the second volume of his second edition of “*The Principles of Psychology*,” published in 1873, Spencer elaborated a causal hypothesis of how play arises in animals, including humans, to become known as the *surplus energy theory*.

Spencer agrees with Schiller, who probably coined the term and the implicit concept that it is a ‘Spieltrieb’—i.e. a play-*impulse* (or *drive* or *instinct*)—which causes playing activity. According to Spencer, this impulse is elicited by the surplus energy which emerges in higher animals and humans because they, unlike lower animals, do not have to expend “all their forces [...] in fulfilling functions essential to the maintenance of life” such as “searching for food, [...]”

---

<sup>18</sup> See e.g. Coakley, *Sport in Society*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, 561; Brehony, “Theories of Play.”

<sup>19</sup> Phillips Stevens, “Laying the Groundwork for an Anthropology of Play,” in *Studies in the Anthropology of Play: Papers in the Memory of Allan Tindall*, ed. Phillips Stevens, Jr. (West Point: Leisure Press, 1977), 238; Jay J. Coakley, *Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 18.

<sup>20</sup> Brehony, “Theories of Play.”

<sup>21</sup> Original German text: “Der Mensch spielt nur, wo er in voller Bedeutung des Wortes Mensch ist, und er ist nur da ganz Mensch, wo er spielt.“ Friedrich Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*. Fünfzehnter Brief (First published 1795).

escaping from enemies, [...] forming places of shelter, and [...] making preparation for progeny.” Due to “having faculties more efficient and more numerous,” higher animals’ “[...] time and strength are not wholly absorbed in providing for immediate needs.” Thus, “[b]etter nutrition, gained by [this] superiority, occasionally yields a surplus of vigor.”<sup>22</sup> These “overflowing energies,” as Spencer then calls this surplus, are released in play. However, it is not random playing activity which they induce, but such in which are engaged “those faculties which take the most prominent parts in the creature’s life.”<sup>23</sup> To exemplify this, Spencer first brings in the rat which, even “if caged, [occupies] itself in gnawing anything it can get hold of.”<sup>24</sup> Further he writes:

[...] dogs and other predatory creatures show us unmistakably that their play consists of mimic chase and mimic fighting—they pursue one another, they try to overthrow one another, they bite one another as much as they dare. And so with the kitten running after a cotton-ball, making it roll and again catching it, crouching as though in ambush and then leaping on it, we see that the whole sport is a dramatizing of the pursuit of prey—an ideal satisfaction for the destructive instincts in the absence of real satisfaction for them. It is the same with human beings. The plays of children—nursing dolls, giving tea-parties, and so on, are dramatizings of adult activities. The sports of boys, chasing one another, wrestling, making prisoners, obviously gratify in a partial way the predatory instincts.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, play, according to Spencer, is in its core a *satisfaction of instincts*, which animals and humans have to do even when there is no immediate, survival-related need for performing them. We then compulsively *imitate* them, i.e. *play* them.

In addition to this basic principle of his theory, several of the other thoughts Spencer unrolls here merit special attention, as they reveal several more principal elements or characteristics of play, which are of particular interest from an *anthropological* perspective focusing on *sports*.

---

<sup>22</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873), 628–29, addition mine.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 630.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 630–31.

The first is that “[f]or Spencer, the release of surplus energy in play takes the form of the imitation of ‘*serious*’ activity”.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the realization of the element of *seriousness* in play, to which already had come Aristotle, is present also in this first coherent, scientific theory of play; hence, one can say, from the very onset of theorizing upon play. Being a correct insight, it remained a crucial part of it ever since.

Second it is, and particularly in regard to this overview’s objective, noteworthy that Spencer fields *sports* as prominent examples of his theory’s ramifications. Thus, we can say that he is in a sense also the founding father of the study of sports. What drives us to perform them, according to Spencer? He writes:

And if we consider even their [the boys’] games of skill, as well as the games of skill practised by adults, we find that, significantly enough, the essential element running through them has the same origin. For no matter what the game, the satisfaction is in achieving victory—in getting the better of an antagonist. This love of conquest, so dominant in all creatures because it is the correlative of success in the struggle for existence, gets gratification from a victory at chess in the absence of ruder victories. Nay, we may even see that playful conversation is characterized by the same element. In banter, in repartee, in “chaff,” the almost-constant trait is some display of relative superiority—the detection of a weakness, a mistake, an absurdity, on the part of another. Through a wit-combat there runs the effort to obtain mental supremacy. That is to say, this activity of the intellectual faculties in which they are not used for purposes of guidance in the business of life, is carried on partly for the sake of the pleasure of the activity itself, and partly for the accompanying satisfaction of certain egoistic feelings which find for the moment no other sphere.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, Spencer identifies the “love of conquest,” which he equates with the “satisfaction in achieving victory,” as the basic origin of “games of skill,” or, in other words, of sports. In this he will be followed by many theorists and researchers of sports.

---

<sup>26</sup> Brehony, “Theories of Play,” emphasis mine.

<sup>27</sup> Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, 631, addition mine.



Third, but surely no less importantly, it has to be emphasized that Spencer's theory can also explain why children commonly play considerably more than do adults. South African psychologist Bernard Altman has phrased this most clearly:

Herbert Spencer suggested a 'surplus energy theory' which explained that the child's playing (jumping, climbing, running, etc.) was a manifestation of his inner energy. Organisms generally use their energy for survival but *children are provided for, resulting in an energy surplus which is rechanneled into play.*<sup>28</sup>

This insight, and in particular that the *human* offspring has to expend the *least* amount of energy for survival purposes of all creatures on earth, in fact practically zero, and as a consequence can play the most of all, has also been taken up by not a few subsequent play researchers and theorizers.

One of them was Karl Groos, a German psychologist and contemporary of Spencer. His studies, published at the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century, became very influential. Groos, however, turned the argument upside down by—correctly as it seems—inverting the cause and effect relation. As a conclusion of his “*practice*” (or “*training*” or “*pre-exercise*”) *theory* (German: “Einübungstheorie”) of play he inferred that “instead of saying, the animals play because they are young, we must say, the animals have a youth in order that they may play.”<sup>29</sup> He rejects a surplus of energy as the cause for play but asserts that an irresistible urge for exercise drives both animals and humans to *practice* actions and skills necessary for survival, which for him is what constitutes play. Hence, concerning his explanation for what *purpose* humans and animals play, that is to say from a *functionalist* point of view, Groos concurs with Spencer. Yet, in regard to the play of young animals and children, he once more turns Spencer's argument around. As they playfully perform basic body movements and actions immediately after birth (or, as I may add, even before birth, like the kicking fetus) they do not mimic or “dramatize” adult activities, argues Groos, but *practice basic instinct behaviors.*<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Bernard Altman, “Working with Play,” *The Child Care Worker* 4, 8 (1986): 11, emphases mine.

<sup>29</sup> Original German quote: “Die Tiere [...] spielen [nicht], weil sie jung und fröhlich sind, sondern man müßte sagen: die Tiere haben eine Jugendzeit, damit sie spielen können.” Karl Groos, *Die Spiele der Tiere*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1907), 68. The (good) translation given in the text is that of Kevin Brehony (Brehony, “Theories of Play”).

<sup>30</sup> Groos, *Die Spiele der Tiere*, 7–8.

Concluding, Groos accentuates that play in its core is an “unintentional *self*-education,”<sup>31</sup> rather than an imitative activity.

## Play is free

Another scholar whose reasoning on play began from the same starting point was Swiss psychotherapist Gustav Bally, author of influential studies undertaken and published in the mid-twentieth century. He too noticed that the extraordinary long parental care performed by humans keeps their infants free from the burdens of life and therefore much longer in a sole playing mode than the infants of any other species. That, in his view, creates the ludic setting which is the humans’ basic attitude.<sup>32</sup>

Among many who followed Bally or held the same or a similar view was New Zealand-American educationalist Brian Sutton-Smith, one of the founding fathers of The Association of the Anthropological Study of Play (TAASP). He too viewed the long and protected youth of humans as one of the biological prerequisites of human playful behavior and discovered—not very surprisingly from today’s perspective—that the longer and the more protected children are able to play, the more explorative behavior they develop, which, in turn, has a positive impact on their learning abilities.<sup>33</sup> Hence, Sutton-Smith detected that the training function of play, which Spencer and Groos had already discovered, encroaches *beyond* the level of only *instinctive behavior* upon the *cognitive* sphere. This, in my eyes, is the pivotal link between play and culture. From there it comes that play and culture *mutually* influence each other, or, in other words, are just two sides of the same coin, a conclusion which Dutch historian Johan Huizinga abundantly described in his book “*Homo Ludens*”<sup>34</sup>.

In this ‘book of the books’ in the field of the study of play, to which we will return in more detail, Huizinga listed as the first characteristic feature of play that it is a “*free* activity.”

---

<sup>31</sup> Original German quote: “absichtslose Selbstausbildung“. Karl Groos, *Das Spiel: Zwei Vorträge* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1922), 11, translation and emphasis mine.

<sup>32</sup> Andrea Fritz, “Ansatz und Deutung des Spiels in der Ethnologie” (MA thesis, Universität Wien, 1985), 36.

<sup>33</sup> Brian Sutton-Smith, *Die Dialektik des Spiels: eine Theorie des Spielens, der Spiele und des Sports* (Schorndorf: Hofmann, 1978), 75–102; see also Fritz, “Ansatz und Deutung des Spiels in der Ethnologie,” 41; and Stephan Schmutz, *Spiele als Medien der Friedenspädagogik* (München: Grin, 2004), 23.

<sup>34</sup> First published in Dutch in 1938; first English publication in 1949. See bibliography.

“*Ordered* play is no play anymore,” he states.<sup>35</sup> Maybe it was this statement by Huizinga that inspired Bally or led him to the development of his main contribution to the discourse, as he very likely read Huizinga’s book, the first German edition of which was published in 1939. Bally took a stand in opposition to both the ‘classical’ play theorists, Spencer, Schiller, and Groos, and their followers and to Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud and his followers in one very important respect. They all were convinced that it is *instincts* (or ‘*urges*’ or ‘*drives*’) which are responsible for why humans play,<sup>36</sup> hence a general assumption that a *play instinct* or *play drive* exists has prevailed.<sup>37</sup> For Bally, by contrast, the principal ludic setting of humans is not the outcome of an instinct but of the opposite: human play emerges, according to him, precisely because humans can disentangle themselves from instinctive behavior, in other words, because of their ability to liberate themselves from instinctive coercions. Only this liberation enables humans to play.<sup>38</sup> Thus, for Bally, *freedom*, understood in this sense, is the most critical constituent of human play. This constitutional importance of freedom for anything called play became a given in the study of games after Bally. In his total denial of the existence of a play-instinct he, however, was not followed by many.

One scholar who followed Bally in regard to the fundamental role of freedom in play, was French sociologist and philosopher Roger Caillois whose conceptualization of play, which he developed in the 1950s, became very influential and was widely used by later social scientists.<sup>39</sup> For Caillois the first constituent of human play is also that it is *free*, i.e. a *voluntary* activity. He, similar to Huizinga, upon whose “*Homo Ludens*” he has built up his concept, states:

---

<sup>35</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: vom Ursprung der Kultur im Spiel* (Hamburg: Rowolth, 1956), 16, translation and emphases mine.

<sup>36</sup> For Freud, as he outlined in his famous book “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1922 [1920], see bibliography), those were the life instinct, the death instinct, and (suppressed) sexual drives.

<sup>37</sup> Christoph Ulf, “Sport bei den Naturvölkern,” in *Der Sport bei den Völkern der Alten Welt: eine Einführung* by Ingomar Weiler (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981), 15.

<sup>38</sup> Gustav Bally, *Vom Ursprung und von den Grenzen der Freiheit. Eine Deutung des Spiels bei Tier und Mensch* (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1945), 87.

<sup>39</sup> Stevens, “Laying the Groundwork for an Anthropology of Play,” 240.

First, [...] play is certainly an activity that is [...] [f]ree: the player cannot be forced to participate without the game immediately changing its very nature.<sup>40</sup>

This recognition of *freedom* as one of the *constitutional features of any kind of human play* by Huizinga, Bally and Caillois has been playing a prevailing role in theory making on play in general, and in *anthropological* play theories in particular, ever since. For Huizinga and Caillois this, however, constituted only *one*—albeit the most important—of *several* critical components of human play. As both Huizinga's and Caillois' concepts became the fundamental theoretical bases upon which practically all play theorists and researchers (at least in socio-cultural anthropology) have drawn later, I shall briefly lay out their essentials here.

## **Culture is played**

Huizinga's key point is his revelation that it is play which is the formative force of all human culture and civilization. In any case they are rooted in play or result from play or, in Huizinga's own words, "arise [...] and unfold [...] *in* and *as* play" and "never leave [...] it."<sup>41</sup> In short, culture *forms* in play, *is* play, or, in fact, culture itself is *played*. Huizinga concludes this from the plethora of play-elements or "play-factors" he detects in practically all spheres of human life and in all kinds of human cultures and civilizations (i.e. societies) over all times and all over the world, for which he gives an abundance of examples in his book. In terms of societies he treats ancient ones, like ancient Greece and ancient India, medieval and modern—mainly European—ones, and also tribal societies, such as those of the Trobriand Islanders and the Indians of the North American Northwest Coast. In terms of spheres of life he detects the crucial roles of play or "play-factors" or "forms of play" in everyday life, festivities, jurisprudence, politics, diplomacy and even in war as well as in art, literature, philosophy and in sexual and recreational activities, and, perhaps most importantly, also in mythology and religious rites. It is through this

---

<sup>40</sup> Roger Caillois, "The Structure and Classification of Games," in *Sport, Culture and Society*, ed. John W. Loy and Gerald S. Kenyon (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), 46. The article was first published in *Diogenes*, no. 12 (1955). See bibliography.

<sup>41</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (1949 [1938]): i and 173, cited in Norbeck, "The Study of Play—Johan Huizinga and Modern Anthropology," 17. For the various editions of Huizinga's book, see bibliography.

“broad vision [of play]”<sup>42</sup> and the resulting “broadening [of] the field and suggesting [of] new topics and [...] approaches” that Huizinga’s “writings [...] have added value for anthropological research,” as Edward Norbeck has stated.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, many anthropologists have shared this opinion with Norbeck and viewed play in this broad ‘Huizingaian’ apprehension. His broad, almost ‘all-inclusive,’ but at the same time accurate and distinctive definition of play, served and still serves well the needs of an academic discipline which itself had widened its scope dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century. Therefore, and for the purpose of this thesis, it makes sense to lay out here what Huizinga has considered playful activities and what, according to him, characterizes them. This was, again, best summarized by Norbeck. In the following I quote how he had condensed and “sometimes paraphrased” what for Huizinga constitutes play:

voluntary, free, freedom  
may be deferred or suspended at any time  
not a task, not ordinary, not real  
essentially unserious in its goals although often seriously executed  
outside the immediate satisfaction of wants and appetite and the individual satisfaction of  
biological needs  
a temporary activity satisfying in itself, an intermezzo or interlude, but an integral part of  
life and a necessity  
distinct in locality and duration  
repetitive  
closely linked with beauty in many ways but not identical with it  
creates order and is order; has rules, rhythm, and harmony  
often related to wit and humor but not synonymous with them  
has elements of tension, uncertainty, chanciness  
casts a spell over us, is enchanting, captivating, intensely and utterly absorbing, joyous,  
has illusion  
older than civilization or culture, it sub-serves culture and becomes culture

---

<sup>42</sup> Robert H. Lavenda, “Play,” in *The Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 3, ed. David Levinson and Melvin Ember (London: Macmillan, 1996), 939.

<sup>43</sup> Norbeck, “The Study of Play—Johan Huizinga and Modern Anthropology,” 13.

outside the antitheses of wisdom and folly, truth and falsehood, good and evil, vice and virtue, has no moral function<sup>44</sup>

Besides providing useful identifications and elucidations of a number of distinctive and important traits of play this wide definitional frame enables a play researcher to contextualize play in relation to other elements of culture and to the culture (or society) as a whole. Hence, it is indeed of high, and very practical value for anthropology, the discipline being (or trying to be) the most holistic of the social sciences.

This broad definitional frame has, however, its problems too. In addition to criticisms of the poor organization of his abundant text, it has been stated that, although Huizinga draws upon a large number of examples, his choice may still be considered insufficient or even biased and thus misleading. This point has been made especially in regard to his linguistic argument that the extensive range of meaning the notion of “play” bears indicates its cultural ubiquity. This may hold true for (his native) Dutch and for German, and perhaps other languages, but definitely not for any language. For instance, what is expressed in Dutch and German by the *single* notion of “play” (Dutch: “spel;” German: “Spiel”) needs to be expressed in English by *two* words, “play” and “game,” which bear marked, distinct meanings.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, loud criticism has been leveled by anthropologists against Huizinga’s ‘Spencerian’ belief (which I believe we can call it, notwithstanding that he does not explicitly refer to Spencer) that competitiveness is innate to humans.<sup>46</sup> Huizinga states that we have an “agonistic ‘instinct’”<sup>47</sup> and that therefore agonism “is the cardinal trait of [human] play,” as Norbeck has paraphrased.<sup>48</sup> Huizinga consequently induces that the cultures of archaic societies are founded upon agonism, i.e. upon contests. As exhibit A of this theory he presents the Kwakiutl and Tlingit and their potlatch customs.<sup>49</sup> Yet, even if this might to some extent hold true for these particular native tribes of North America’s Northwest Coast, it certainly cannot be

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>45</sup> Andreas Flitner, “Johan Huizingas Homo ludens,” in *Homo Ludens—Der spielende Mensch*, vol. 1, ed. Günther G. Bauer (München: Musikverlag Emil Katzschler, 1991), 19–24. This difference causes, for instance, big difficulties in translating play or games related literature in either direction—from English into German or from German into English.

<sup>46</sup> Norbeck, “The Study of Play—Johan Huizinga and Modern Anthropology,” 18.

<sup>47</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (1956), 73.

<sup>48</sup> Norbeck, “The Study of Play—Johan Huizinga and Modern Anthropology,” 18.

<sup>49</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (1956), 70–74.

generalized as an all-time, all-human supra-cultural trait. Just to give two counter-examples, both from the realm of sport, in which one probably would expect to find more proof than disproof of Huizinga's assertion: Melanesian soccer games end only when the two teams had come to a draw, even if that takes them several days of playing.<sup>50</sup> The same practice was found among North American Natives, who too would end their lacrosse games only when they had achieved a tie.<sup>51</sup>

## What is play?

Roger Caillois, the French sociologist and philosopher whose contributions to the theory of play became, as mentioned, very influential, also criticized Huizinga. He, however, disagrees with Huizinga only in regard to partial aspects of what to treat or not treat as play. In regard to the “fundamental characteristics of play and [...] the importance of its role in the development of civilization” he agrees with Huizinga.<sup>52</sup>

One disagreement he has with Huizinga, is that he argues that one also has to view games of chance, i.e. betting, gambling, lotteries, and the like, as play, which Huizinga did not, because for him one defining trait of play was that it “is an activity connected with no material interest, and [that] no profit can be gained by it.”<sup>53</sup> On this point not many followed Huizinga as Caillois' argument that playing and pursuing material interest do not exclude each other seems to be convincing. Furthermore Caillois detects that Huizinga had overlooked “such things as kites, crossword puzzles, and rocking horses, and to some extent dolls, games of patience, Chinese puzzles, hoops, most toys, and several of the more widespread diversions.”<sup>54</sup> This, however, in my eyes, only shows what I have stated already in the beginning of this chapter: How, what, and with what we (can) play is unlimited; the possibilities are infinite. Thus, I believe that—by

---

<sup>50</sup> Jeremy MacClancy, “Sport, Identity and Ethnicity,” in *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity*, ed. Jeremy MacClancy (Oxford: Berg, 1996), 8; Henning Eichberg, *Leistung, Spannung, Geschwindigkeit: Sport und Tanz im gesellschaftlichen Wandel des 18./19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978), 17.

<sup>51</sup> Jeremy MacClancy, “Sport, Identity and Ethnicity,” 8.

<sup>52</sup> Caillois, “The Structure and Classification of Games,” 44.

<sup>53</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (1949), 13.

<sup>54</sup> Caillois, “The Structure and Classification of Games,” 45–46.

implication—no definition of play can be complete, including that of Caillois. Nevertheless, his has become widely used, and for good reasons.

The special value of Caillois' contribution resides in its ingenious two-fold, or crosscut *classification* of games with which he successfully copes with this boundless, at the same time all-encompassing and all-enclosing, seemingly unclassifiable realm of infinite manifestations and possibilities. American anthropologist Robert Lavenda summarized it best:

Roger Caillois [...] developed a classificatory system for play. [...] Caillois distinguished between *agon* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimicry* (simulation), and *ilinx* (vertigo). These categories of play are crosscut by a continuum of ways of playing, from *ludus* (controlled and regulated play) to *paidia* (spontaneous play).<sup>55</sup>

Under the category of *agôn* (Classical Greek for “contest”) Caillois subsumes all games and other playful activities—physical, intellectual, and combinations of both—in which the participants compete and want to achieve a victory. It is essential that circumstances are created, or rules established, that guarantee an equality of chance for every participant to give “*incontestable worth* to the victor’s triumph.”<sup>56</sup> Caillois—by taking up a ‘Huizingaian’ position, as I would call it—emphasizes that *agôn* cannot only be observed in activities deliberately designed and clearly marked as *play*, but also in other, actually quite *serious* spheres of life, as for instance in duel, tournament, and even warfare.<sup>57</sup>

*Alea* is the Latin word for the game of dice which Caillois has chosen for the denomination of the games of chance. These “are based upon an *inequality* external to the player, over which he has not the slightest control.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, a win is not a victory over an adversary or an obstacle, but over *destiny*. Caillois writes: “*Agôn* is a vindication of personal responsibility, *alea* a resignation of the will, a surrender to destiny.”<sup>59</sup> This, however, according to Caillois, is precisely the *function* of *alea*, i.e. of games of chance: to give *equal chances* to win to everyone, *irrespective* of skills, knowledge, and intelligence. In my eyes this is a very important insight which especially anthropologists who study play should keep in mind.

---

<sup>55</sup> Lavenda, “Play,” 939.

<sup>56</sup> Caillois, “The Structure and Classification of Games,” 47, emphases mine.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



With *mimicry* Caillois denotes all forms of imitation, simulation, or illusion, ranging from the “child who pretends he is an airplane [...] by stretching out his arms and imitating the roar of a motor” to all kinds of masquerade and disguise, and to theatre and drama.<sup>60</sup> All this is playful activity as actors as well as spectators perfectly know that it is just a fake, a make-believe, an acting as if.

Under the fourth category, *ilinx* (Classical Greek for “whirlpool”), Caillois subsumes all activities in which feelings of vertigo, giddiness, thrill of speed, and the like are created for the purpose of enjoyment. To this category, as Caillois writes, belong the usage of such old and relatively innocuous devices as the swing and the merry-go-round as well as roller coasters and the heap of other technical torture machines provided in amusement parks and also all activities involving high speed such as the driving of racing cars or motorcycles.<sup>61</sup> To these we can surely add some diversions which were developed and became popular only after Caillois’ days, such as bungee jumping or slack-lining, to close the circle with an innocuous but—surprisingly—just recently invented diversion. What all these activities make to be play, and the partly perilously powerful machines to be toys, is that the ‘threats’ and ‘dangers’ are not real (when all necessary safety precautions are taken of course) and that participation is free, i.e. voluntary.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to the identification of *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry* and *ilinx* as the four principal *categories* of play, following Caillois, two more crucial analytical steps have to be made to cope with the amplitude and complexity of all the activities we call play.

The first of these steps is on the dice. It is that the four categories of play do not appear only discretely, but more often *combine* with each other in various ways. We all know plenty of games which combine *agôn* and *alea*, ranging from card games to sport competitions. *Agôn* and *mimicry* combine for instance in costume contests and in the striving of actors to play better than their ‘colleagues,’ i.e. to get the more appreciation from the audience.<sup>63</sup> Also, and here I disagree with Caillois who thought that this combination is impossible,<sup>64</sup> I think that *ilinx* and *agôn* often combine, like for example in bobsled or car races or in rock climbing. The dervishes’ whirling dances may serve as an example of a combination of *ilinx* and *mimicry*. Also combinations of

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 53–54.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>64</sup> Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 72–73.

three of these motives appear, for instance when the outcome of car races is the subject of betting. This then is a combination of *ilinx*, *agôn*, and *alea*. In short, one can probably bring up examples for all possible combinations, if only one thinks long enough.

The second, or, in fact, the third analytical step, which Caillois makes—after the identification of the four principal categories of play (step 1) and the pointer to that they are often combined (step 2)—is his recognition that, in addition to these *categories* of play, two principal *structural configurations*, as I would call them, determine every play-act, according to their respective ratio in the play or game. This ratio determines *how* it is played and what *type of task* the player or the players has/have to fulfill. Caillois calls these two structural principles *paidia* and *ludus*. The first refers to “the *spontaneous* manifestations [...] of the instinct of play: the cat entangled in a ball of yarn, the dog licking himself, the infant laughing in his rattle.”<sup>65</sup> It is the immediate expression of “joyous exuberance,” it is “disordered” and “impulsive” and its “impromptu and unruly character remains its essential, if not its sole *raison d'être*”<sup>66</sup>. The counterpart of this “primary power of improvisation and gaiety”<sup>67</sup> in play is *ludus*, with which Caillois denotes the spectrum of invented and introduced rules, tasks and “gratuitous difficult[ies]”<sup>68</sup>, which to struggle against and to finally resolve brings satisfaction and joy.<sup>69</sup> This component of play regulation broadly varies in regard to its complexity, from the stretching of the arms and imitating the sound of a motor of the ‘airplane-child’ to highly complicated and heavily regulated games like, for instance, chess or baseball (the latter so complex that the author of these lines doubts that he ever will understand it)<sup>70</sup>.

These two basic modules of play, i.e. its four *categories* and its two *structural configurations*, employed in a grid with the first placed along one axis and the second as a continuum stretching from a high *paidia* - low *ludus* ratio (i.e. “just fun” to what American sport sociologist Donald Calhoun has boiled it down) to a low *paidia* - high *ludus* ratio (or “organized

---

<sup>65</sup> Caillois, “The Structure and Classification of Games,” 51.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 51–52.

<sup>70</sup> This might be a rather petulant comment on my part, however, it points to two important characteristics of games: first, that the amount and the complexity of rules, which must be obeyed in a game, need to be limited to the players’ capability to apprehend them, otherwise the game cannot be played; second it shows that one’s capability of understanding the rules and the ‘soul’ of a game is *culturally* predetermined. Many of my American friends on their part hopelessly lack any understanding of soccer.

play” in Calhoun’s words)<sup>71</sup> on the other axis, allows to classify and to characterize any playful activity whatsoever. For the purpose of a better understanding I have reproduced the exemplary grid Caillois has provided in his book “*Man, Play, and Games*”<sup>72</sup> (see Table 1). This shall make clear how it works.

**Table 1: Classification of Games by Roger Caillois**

	<b>AGÔN (Competition)</b>	<b>ALEA (Chance)</b>	<b>MIMICRY (Simulation)</b>	<b>ILINX (Vertigo)</b>
<p><b>PAIDIA</b></p> <p>↑</p> <p>Tumult Agitation Immoderate laughter</p> <p>Kite-flying Solitaire Patience Crossword puzzles</p> <p>↓</p> <p><b>LUDUS</b></p>	<p>Racing Wrestling Etc. } Not Athletics regulated</p> <p>Boxing, Billiards Fencing, Checkers Football, Chess</p> <p>Contests, Sports in general</p>	<p>Counting-out rhymes Heads or tails</p> <p>Betting Roulette</p> <p>Simple, complex, and continuing lotteries</p>	<p>Children’s initiation Games of illusion Tag, Arms Masks, Disguises</p> <p>Theater Spectacles in general</p>	<p>Children “whirling” Horseback riding Swinging Waltzing</p> <p>Volador Traveling carnivals Skiing Mountain climbing Tightrope walking</p>

**In each vertical column games are classified in such an order that the *paidia* element is constantly decreasing while the *ludus* element is ever increasing.**

With this typologization one can bring order to the abundant realm of play, games, and sports and relate them to each other in a coherent system. Thus, it is a useful tool for the analysis of all playful or play-like activities and, moreover, for their cross-cultural comparison. It operates with precisely defined and clearly distinguished categories, but is, at the same time, a flexible enough concept to be applicable to probably any ‘play case’ investigated. It is therefore no wonder that

<sup>71</sup> Donald W. Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality* (Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1987), 46.

<sup>72</sup> Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 36.

many play and sport researchers, and particularly many anthropologists, have used Caillois' conceptualization.

In addition to its applicability and practicability there is possibly one more reason why Caillois' concept, and—to a certain degree—also Huizinga's, became esteemed by many anthropologists—one which interestingly relates to science history: In both their conceptualizations of the phenomenon of play and its relation(s) to other social institutions, and to society as a whole, the recognition of a *binary opposition* plays a crucial role. Those are *play versus earnest* as concerns Huizinga, and *paidia versus ludus* as concerns Caillois. It seems that the recognition of the fundamentality, which for humans constitutes the thinking in binary oppositions and the acting in the continua between their two poles, was in the air at that time. Claude Levi-Strauss' "*The Savage Mind*"<sup>73</sup> was published only shortly after Huizinga and Caillois had come up with their ideas. Thereafter, the thinking *about* and, as a reflection, the theorizing *in* binary oppositions became mainstream in the social sciences, including anthropology.

Those days, i.e. the first decades after World War Two, seem to have been in general a stimulating period for the theorizing of play, as it was also in that time when two more important contributions to the anthropological theory of play were made. The first of these contributions was British anthropologist Gregory Bateson's detection that play constitutes an activity which is *framed by meta-communication*.<sup>74</sup> That means that play can only be performed by organisms who are capable of recognizing messages of differing logical types, which provide information about *how another* message should be interpreted. My colleague Andreas Droulias concisely and precisely explained the implication this has for play:

Its [i.e. play's] 'reality' is dependent on a shared, sometimes fragile, acknowledgment between actors that an action does not mean what it would normally mean but it means something else. Combat play, for instance, involving wrestling and grabbing, is based on meta-communication so that players know that it is not real combat but play.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966. Original French publication: *La pensée sauvage*. Paris: Plon, 1962.

<sup>74</sup> Bateson's "A Theory of Play and Fantasy" was first published in 1955. See bibliography.

<sup>75</sup> Andreas Droulias, untitled "Comprehensive Paper" (unpublished manuscript finished in 2010), 9, addition mine. Robert Lavenda explains this logical paradox of play to which Bateson had pointed by using, like Bateson

Droulias' emphasis of the *fragile* character of this acknowledgement is, in my eyes, of particular importance, as *meta-communication* is per definition open to differences of perception and, thus, prone to misunderstandings. It is this, for any kind of play characteristic *type* of *communication*, which brings about the frequent disagreements between players while playing and even about whether their activity is play or not. Thus, this is inherent to play; nay, in fact, one of its most characteristic features.

The final important contribution to the study of games made in those post-World War Two years was that of John Roberts, Malcolm Arth and Robert Bush, published in their often cited article "Games in Culture," in the *American Anthropologist* in 1959.<sup>76</sup> They carried out the first statistics-driven cross-cultural investigation of games with the aim to detect relationships between different types of games and certain social, spiritual, and environmental features. They categorized ethnographic data from 50 different societies from all over the world (most of them small native or indigenous peoples, but also some bigger nations like Vietnam and Korea) and related it to three types of games. The result of this study, as they stated,

---

himself, the well-known example of the dogs' 'play face' and their way of playing: "Dogs, for example, have the play face, a signal understood by other dogs (and recognizable by human beings) indicating a willingness to play. If dogs agree to play, their fangs are bared, and one animal attacks the other, but the bite is not consummated; it becomes a nip. Both dogs have agreed to enter the play frame, a world in which bites do not mean bites." Lavenda, "Play," 937. Bateson has put it that way: "The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite;" and, more generally, "[...] the statement 'This is play' [means that] these actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote." Gregory Bateson, *Steps to An Ecology of Mind* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1972), 185–86, addition mine. "Put another way," Lavenda concludes, "a basic element of Western logic—that  $A = A$ —does not apply in play; or, the "same" thing is being treated in different ways." Lavenda, "Play," 937. A lucid example from the world of sports, and by using Huizinga's metaphor of "Magic Circle" for the play frame, provides Scott Kilmer: "In the recent Russia/Team Canada hockey series, the Russians were winning the sixth game by one goal late in the game. The Canadians were trying hard to tie the game (which was being played in Russia), but the horn blew, ending the game and breaking the temporal dimension of the sixty minute Magic Circle. A Canadian player, however, refused to listen to the horn, and began to punch a Russian player after the game had ended. The next day the Russian coach issued a statement to the papers stating that the Canadian player should be arrested and sent to jail for accosting a Russian citizen. The Magic Circle of the hockey game had been broken and the player were then in the profane world, where one is arrested for punching people. The event was cleared up and the Canadian player was not arrested, but the seriousness of the Russian coach's actions was a good illustration of the temporal aspect of the Magic Circle." Scott Kilmer, "Sport as Ritual: A Theoretical Approach," in *The Study of Play: Problems and Prospects*, ed. David F. Lancy and Allan Tindall (West Point: Leisure Press, 1977), 47.

<sup>76</sup> John M. Roberts, Malcolm J. Arth and Robert R. Bush, "Games in Culture," *American Anthropologist* 61, 4 (1959): 597–605.

suggests that games of strategy are related to social systems, games of chance are related to religious beliefs, and games of physical skill may be related to environmental conditions.<sup>77</sup>

In concrete terms the three authors of this study suggested that, first, “the more complex the social system, the greater the likelihood a particular society will have games of strategy,” as Kendall Blanchard more clearly construed the authors original statement.<sup>78</sup> Second they found that “[i]t is commonly thought by many peoples that the winners of games of chance have received supernatural or magical aid,”<sup>79</sup> and third that “tribes living within 20 degrees latitude of the equator” have on average “fewer games of physical skill” than “tribes living more than 20 degrees north or south.”<sup>80</sup> It was, however, less because of these suggested results that the study became influential than of its particular design, i.e. that it was *cross-cultural* in terms of its scope and *statistical* in terms of its method. This became a model for similar studies carried out later.

One can say that it is essentially these four conceptual and theoretical elaborations, Huizinga’s, Caillois’, Bateson’s, and Roberts, Arth and Bush’s, all introduced to the academic community in the relatively short period from the late 1930s to the late 1950s, i.e. in the midst of the twentieth century, upon which most of the research and the writings on sport and play have resided ever since, at least in anthropology. Of the definitions of play given by those six scholars, that of Caillois became, as already indicated, the one which was (and still is) most often referred to; therefore I present it here too. According to him, play is an activity which is essentially:

1. *Free*: in which playing is not obligatory; if it were, it would at once lose its attractive and joyous quality as diversion;
2. *Separate*: circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance;

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 604.

<sup>78</sup> Kendall Blanchard, *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*, revised edition (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1995), 18.

<sup>79</sup> Roberts, Arth and Bush, “Games in Culture,” 601.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 604.

3. *Uncertain*: the course of which cannot be determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and some latitude for innovations being left to the player's initiative;
4. *Unproductive*: creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for the exchange of property among the players, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game;
5. *Governed by rules*: under conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts;
6. *Make-believe*: accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of free unreality, as against real life.<sup>81</sup>

As I said, I have chosen to provide this particular definition because of its prevalence in the anthropological study of play, or in other words, because of the substantial influence it had and still has. Irrespectively, it too, as every other definition of play, has shortcomings and aspects which are at least questionable. I will discuss some of its weaknesses and doubtful aspects in what follows, where I will focus on the anthropological study of *sports*, in which a wealth of examples can be found for this purpose. The same holds true in regard to the dichotomy—or *binary opposition*—between play and earnestness, as particularly in *sports anthropology* this became one of the central matters of debate. It has been addressed from various perspectives, and was put in the form of binary oppositions such as *play* versus *work*, *play* versus *seriousness*, *fake* versus *reality*, *purposeless* versus *purposeful*, and so forth. This indicates that it is probably sports, which in the realm of play constitute the most multifarious and dichotomous activities. Indeed, they often combine the seemingly incompatible and blur the categories and boundaries set up in definitions. Thus, sports issue a real challenge to anthropological analysis.

To be fully equipped for this undertaking and for the sake of completeness, I shall briefly mention that, in the time period covered so far, research and theory-making on play has been undertaken not only in the social sciences but also in other disciplines. Besides the development of a game theory in mathematics,<sup>82</sup> considerable research on play has been undertaken by

---

<sup>81</sup> Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 9–10.

<sup>82</sup> This theory is not entirely irrelevant to social sciences, as it has been applied in sociology, political and economic sciences, but (to my knowledge) it was not taken up in anthropology.

psychologists and psychiatrists.<sup>83</sup> They have focused on the one hand on play as a manifestation of the subconscious and on its utilization as therapy,<sup>84</sup> and on the other hand on the study of play from the perspective of developmental psychology and on children's play in general.<sup>85</sup>

Concerning children's play, anthropologists have also shown an interest in it, with Margaret Mead—e.g. in her classic book *“Coming of Age in Samoa”*<sup>86</sup>—as probably the most prominent representative,<sup>87</sup> although her main focus was almost never on play and games.<sup>88</sup> Helen Schwartzman, by contrast, made them a focus of her work. Together with Brian Sutton-Smith, whom I have already mentioned, and being, like him, a member of The Association of the Anthropological Study of Play, she molded the anthropology of children's play. “The definitive work on this subject,” stated Robert Lavenda “is [and still is today, as I may add] by Helen Schwartzman.”<sup>89</sup> Her book *“Transformations: The Anthropology of Children's Play”*<sup>90</sup>, however, does not contain anything which in particular refers to sports or sporting activities. By contrast, Brian Sutton-Smith frequently referred to examples from the realm of sport. Hence, we will meet him again in the next stage of our race through the history of the anthropology of sports.

---

<sup>83</sup> e.g. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922 [1920]); George H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (1934); Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (1950) and Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* (1951 [1945]). See bibliography.

<sup>84</sup> This also includes competitive sports, as they “may serve to act out strife in a kind of athletic psychodrama that can be therapeutic for participants and observers alike.” Robert F. Murphy, *Cultural and Social Anthropology: An Overture*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1989), 167.

<sup>85</sup> Flitner, “Johan Huizingas Homo ludens,” 22; John W. Loy and Gerald S. Kenyon, “The Sociology of Sport: An Emerging Field,” in *Sport, Culture and Society*, ed. John W. Loy and Gerald S. Kenyon (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), 3; Alyce T. Cheska, “The Study of Play from Five Anthropological Perspectives,” in *Play: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Michael A. Salter (West Point: Leisure Press, 1978), 21–22; Brian Sutton-Smith, “Towards an Anthropology of Play,” in *Studies in the Anthropology of Play: Papers in the Memory of Allan Tindall*, ed. Phillips Stevens, Jr. (West Point: Leisure Press, 1977), 223.

<sup>86</sup> Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Study of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Societies*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1928.

<sup>87</sup> Norbeck, “The Study of Play—Johan Huizinga and Modern Anthropology,” 15.

<sup>88</sup> The only exception is her short article “A Choctaw Ball Game,” published in *Primitive Heritage: An Anthropological Anthology*, edited by Margaret Mead and Nicolas Calas (New York: Random House, 1953), 289–95.

<sup>89</sup> Lavenda, “Play,” 939.

<sup>90</sup> Helen B. Schwartzman, *Transformations: The Anthropology of Children's Play* (New York: Plenum Press, 1978).



## Sports anthropology: from a jump start to lagging behind

Roberts, Arth, and Bush opened their above mentioned article “Games in Culture,” with the following statement:

Recreational activities have been classic ethnographic concerns, and sophisticated questions about the distribution of games were asked early in history of anthropology.<sup>91</sup>

As regards the second statement made in this sentence, one can only agree. Games, indeed, had to serve both as examples of theories of cultural diffusion and as counter-examples to it. I shall briefly recount the best-known of these disputes, but before I get on to that we need to take into closer consideration the first statement of Roberts, Arth, and Bush.

We need to discuss this statement, because there is, first, salient disagreement and an actual uncertainty whether “recreational activities” really have been “classic ethnographic concerns” and, if agreed, which particular kinds of such activities came into the focus of that concern. Second, there is widespread dissatisfaction among many who were or are considering themselves as play or sports anthropologists about what ethnographic data about games and sports had been collected and how this data was treated, or for what purposes it was used thereafter.

Several authors who deal with this matter state, or rather complain, that anthropologists, for a long time, have paid nearly no attention to the games and sportive activities of the ethnic groups they had studied,<sup>92</sup> or that their treatments of such activities, and especially of sports, “were typically peripheral to the issues regarded as more central to the discipline, such as kinship, ritual, the evolution of the state and so on.”<sup>93</sup>

Thus, for a long time, many anthropologists did not consider play, games, and sports as human activities serious or important enough to be a subject worth of study. Moreover, this negligent attitude, rooted, as described above, in the Protestant work ethic, prevalent in Western

---

<sup>91</sup> Roberts, Arth and Bush, “Games in Culture,” 597.

<sup>92</sup> Hans Damm, “Vom Wesen sog. Leibesübungen bei Naturvölkern. Ein Beitrag zur Genese des Sportes,” *Studium Generale* 13, 1 (1960): 1; Hans Kamphausen, “Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern: Ein problemorientierter Überblick,” in *Geschichte der Leibesübungen*, ed. Horst Ueberhorst, vol. 1 (Berlin: Bartels- und Wernitz, 1972), 65. See also Krist, “Where Going back is a Step Forward,” 105–6.

<sup>93</sup> Susan Brownell, “Why Should an Anthropologist Study Sports in China?” in *Games, Sports and Cultures*, ed. Noel Dyck (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 43.

academia, led to the bizarre but widespread practice of not calling a spade a spade: very often all forms of play, including games and sports, either ran just as ‘recreation’ or ‘leisure’<sup>94</sup> or were “described under the heading of *religion*.”<sup>95</sup> In other words, “anthropologists of the past rarely concerned themselves with play as a *generic* subject.”<sup>96</sup>

This is, at least at first sight, very surprising, when we take into consideration the history of the anthropological concern for play, and in particular for games, because anthropologists actually took account of them very “early in [the] history” of their discipline and did, in fact, collect a “vast amount of [...] data on [...] forms of play,”<sup>97</sup> which led to the publication of a “great deal of anthropological or ethnological literature on play and games,”<sup>98</sup> from the late 1870s onwards up to the present day. However, if we take a closer look at the kind and character these writings, up to the midst of the twentieth century (when, as described above, significant theoretical progress in the study and analysis of play was made), and the purpose for which they were mainly written, a different picture emerges.

It was already the ‘founding father’ of (British) social anthropology, Sir Edward Tylor, who was “the first professional anthropologist to realize the potential of games as a key to understanding culture.”<sup>99</sup> He referred to games of all kinds and from all over the world in several of his writings, including his classic book “*Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization*”, in which he fielded them as proof for both his evolutionist views, including his well-known concept of cultural ‘survivals,’ and as examples of cultural diffusion.<sup>100</sup> This was typical for him, as he was in his writings on games in general less concerned about the games themselves than about utilizing them for theoretical arguments. He used them especially often in the diffusion versus independent invention debate,<sup>101</sup> the major debate among anthropologists in those early decades of the discipline’s history. Tylor usually championed diffusion in that

---

<sup>94</sup> Stevens, “Laying the Groundwork for an Anthropology of Play,” 238.

<sup>95</sup> Norbeck, “The Study of Play—Johan Huizinga and Modern Anthropology,” 14, emphasis mine.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, emphasis mine.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>98</sup> Tsuneo Sogawa, review of *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*, ed. Kendall Blanchard and Alyce Taylor Cheska (South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey, 1985), *Asian Folklore Studies* 48, 2 (1989): 300.

<sup>99</sup> Cheska, “The Study of Play from Five Anthropological Perspectives,” 18.

<sup>100</sup> Edward B. Tylor, *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization* (New York: Appleton, 1881), 304–8.

<sup>101</sup> Stevens, “Laying the Groundwork for an Anthropology of Play,” 239.

debate.<sup>102</sup> Well-known is his argument with his contemporary Stewart Culin, who, even more than Tylor, was “a vigorous proponent of game universalism and game diffusion,”<sup>103</sup> but believed that games of Native Americans diffused into Asia,<sup>104</sup> whereas Tylor argued that the diffusion went in the opposite direction, i.e. from Asia into America.<sup>105</sup> They could not settle their argument during their lifetimes, which, perhaps, was good for both of them, because it eventually turned out that very likely both of them were wrong, as the particular games about which they were arguing in all likelihood were parallel inventions.<sup>106</sup>

Tylor’s argument with Culin was only one example of the huge impact this acrimonious debate on diffusion versus parallel invention had on how anthropologists dealt with games and sports in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This debate together with the panic-stricken fear of the imminent vanishing of most of ‘primitive culture,’ due to the outcome of centuries-long predatory colonialism, created a rage of collecting ethnographic objects and other data, including the description of games. Stewart Culin’s immense collecting activity—between 1889 and 1925 he published sixteen works on games, containing the descriptions of hundreds of games and sports—was only the tip of the iceberg. As Norbeck and Japanese sport anthropologist Tsuneo Sogawa rightly stated, numerous others also collected “a vast amount” and published “a great deal.” Only my personal, surely not complete, survey of literature yielded dozens of anthropological publications about games in addition to those of Culin, published in the time period ranging from his days until approximately the midst of the twentieth century. The big problem with that large amount of data, however, is that its documentary value for a deeper anthropological analysis is limited, because most often only the “*text*” of the games, i.e. a mere description of them and of their rules, but no “*context*” is provided, as Helen Schwartzman had

---

<sup>102</sup> See e.g. Edward B. Tylor, “On the Game of Patolli in Ancient Mexico, and its Probably Asiatic Origin,” *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 8 (1878): 116–31; idem, “The History of Games,” *The Fortnightly Review* 25 (1879): 735–49; and idem, “On American Lot-Games, as Evidence of Asiatic Intercourse before the Time of Columbus,” *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* 9, supplement (1896): 55–67.

<sup>103</sup> Elliott. M. Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Study of Games* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971), 55.

<sup>104</sup> Blanchard, *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*, 14.

<sup>105</sup> See Tylor, “On American Lot-Games.”

<sup>106</sup> This debate was held in particular over the explanation of the striking similarity of the Aztec board game “*patolli*” with “*pachisi*,” a board game played in India. Only after World War Two, two convincing statements resolved the problem. First, Alfred Kroeber (1948, see bibliography) concluded that a diffusion of the game was highly unlikely, because no other traits of Indian origin can be found in the Aztec culture, and, second, Charles Erasmus (1950, see bibliography) explained the similarity by the limited possible number of variations of games of that type.

aply delineated this problem.<sup>107</sup> With little to no information about the *context*, i.e. how often is the game played, who plays, who does not, how old are the players, of which gender, why do they play, what does it mean for them, etc., it is indeed difficult to conduct a meaningful anthropological analysis.

In addition to this fundamental shortcoming of most of the ethnographic data about games collected in this period, a number of other factors impeded fruitful research and analysis. First, until fairly recently, the majority of play researchers among anthropologists largely ignored any literature written in any other language than their own. American scholars especially were blamed for this, e.g. by aforementioned Japanese sport anthropologist Tsuneo Sogawa, who particularly criticized Kendall Blanchard and Alyce Taylor Cheska—two leading figures in American sports anthropology—for the fact that they refer in their textbook *“The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction”*<sup>108</sup> almost only to literature “in English, written mainly by American scholars” and to almost none of the “enormous number of anthropological or ethnological studies on sport written in non-English languages such as German, French, Dutch, Japanese, and so forth.”<sup>109</sup> I agree with Sogawa in regard to this critique, but come, to a certain degree, to the Americans’ defense, as, in my eyes, not a few of at least the German publications do perhaps really not deserve to be taken into consideration. I say this, because many of them express views which one cannot just describe as evolutionist (which was the dominating, or at least a widespread mindset among anthropologists of whatever origin in that time period), but as outright racist. This may not be much of a surprise regarding Carl Diem’s *“Asiatische Reiterspiele (Asiatic Equestrian Games)”*<sup>110</sup>, as this book was published in 1941 in Berlin. Karl Weule’s “explicit racism that characterizes his view of primitive man”<sup>111</sup> in his book *“Ethnologie des Sports (Ethnology of Sport)”*<sup>112</sup>, published in 1926—i.e. seven years *before* the

---

<sup>107</sup> Schwartzman, *Transformations: The Anthropology of Children’s Play*, 96. Indeed there are only very few exceptions to this. The most noteworthy of these are the studies of James Mooney on the Cherokee’s ball game (Mooney 1890, see bibliography) and Raymond Firth on the dart matches on the Solomon island of Tikopia (Firth 1930, see bibliography), both providing substantial information about these games’ social contexts.

<sup>108</sup> Kendall Blanchard and Alyce T. Cheska, *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction* (South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey, 1985).

<sup>109</sup> Sogawa, review of *The Anthropology of Sport* (Blanchard and Cheska 1985), 301.

<sup>110</sup> Carl Diem, *Asiatische Reiterspiele: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte der Völker* (Berlin: Deutscher Archiv-Verlag, 1941).

<sup>111</sup> Blanchard, *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*, 15.

<sup>112</sup> Karl Weule, “Ethnologie des Sports: der Sport der Natur- und Urvölker, exotische Sports,” in *Geschichte des Sports aller Völker und Zeiten*, ed. G. A. E. Bogeng (Leipzig, Seemann, 1926), vol. 1, 1–75.

fascist takeover in Germany—and that of Hans Damm in his article “Vom Wesen sog. Leibesübungen bei Naturvölkern: Ein Beitrag zur Genese des Sportes (*The So-Called Sport Activities of Primitive People: A Contribution Toward a Genesis of Sport*),”<sup>113</sup> published in 1960, thus long *after* the end of the Nazi regime, however, elicit incredulous head-shaking. Thus, these (and similar) works have, if at all, only that very limited documentary value which I described above, by referring to Helen Schwartzman’s delineation of the character of most ethnographic data about games available by the 1970s, when she wrote her seminal book.

Another, though similar, impediment to meaningful anthropological consideration and analysis of sport activities in non-industrialized societies was, as already intimated, the concept of evolutionism, to which many anthropologists in one way or another stuck until deep into the twentieth century. Evolutionists’, perhaps not racist but surely Eurocentric and often derogatory, attitude towards their ‘objects of study’ significantly hampered a proper understanding of those ‘objects’ sport competitions, as they frequently refused to name them *sports*, as such—in their view—could occur only in ‘higher developed’ societies. Sports of ‘primitive’ peoples could only be ‘games’ or just ‘play.’<sup>114</sup>

The most notable deficiency of anthropology in regard to research on sports, however, is the significantly delayed start of *ethnographic* research, in the sense that research that deserved to be called as such and was *specifically focusing* on sports was not undertaken earlier than around the 1930s,<sup>115</sup> and even thereafter remained a rarity for at least two more decades. Norbeck cites for this time period only, and as the praiseworthy exception, Alfred Kroeber, who carried out what I would call ‘experimental anthropology,’ as he, according to Norbeck, was actually playing the games of the Indians of the Great Plains together with his students at Berkeley.<sup>116</sup> Maybe this was helpful, as finally, in the 1950s, anthropologists started to undertake more often ethnographic research specifically focused on sports and on play in general.<sup>117</sup>

This, however, was not only very late, but also not exceptional at all, as sociologists have paid attention to sports both considerably earlier and to a much higher degree. As they could

---

<sup>113</sup> Hans Damm, “Vom Wesen sog. Leibesübungen bei Naturvölkern. Ein Beitrag zur Genese des Sportes,” 1–9.

<sup>114</sup> Ulf, “Sport bei den Naturvölkern,” 14.

<sup>115</sup> Sogawa, review of *The Anthropology of Sport* (Blanchard and Cheska 1985), 301.

<sup>116</sup> Norbeck, “The Study of Play—Johan Huizinga and Modern Anthropology,” 15

<sup>117</sup> Schwartzman, *Transformations: The Anthropology of Children’s Play*, 5.

draw on a large corpus of analyses of sport activities, compiled from the early 1930s onwards,<sup>118</sup> a discipline of the ‘sociology of sport’ or ‘sport sociology’ could already be established in the first half of the 1960s and soon became a widely accepted and esteemed academic discipline. As early as 1964 a UNESCO Committee on Sport Sociology was founded.<sup>119</sup> In anthropology, by contrast, the state of affairs at that time was far from anything even close to such a development and even in the present day sport anthropologists have not made it into UNESCO. As a consequence, until fairly recently, “more than a few” sport anthropologists “proceeded to “wrap” themselves “in the garb of a sociologist.”<sup>120</sup> In 2000 Susan Brownell, one of America’s leading sport anthropologists of today, thus bitterly complained:

There is no professional journal on the anthropology of sport, nor is there an international organization of scholars; there is not even an association of that title under the American Anthropological Association, which includes everything from the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness to the Society for the Anthropology of Work.<sup>121</sup>

### **Anthropologists catch up**

Brownell’s complaint is right in the literal sense, hence justified. However, in my eyes, she paints things a little bit too blackly. First there *are* professional associations of sport anthropologists which, although they are not under the umbrella of the *American Anthropological Association*, should not go unmentioned.

The first of these associations I have already mentioned twice: “The Anthropological Association for the Study of Play” (TAASP). It was founded in London, Ontario, Canada, in 1974, by anthropologists, physical educators, and historians, thus as an interdisciplinary project. That’s why its name was later changed to just “The Association for the Study of Play” (TASP) as which it exists up to the present day and is, in fact, feverishly active. This North-America based professional organization always had and still has a “continuing commitment [...] to the

---

<sup>118</sup> Loy and Kenyon, “The Sociology of Sport: An Emerging Field,” 4.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>120</sup> Noel Dyck, “Introduction,” in *Games, Sports and Cultures*, ed. Noel Dyck (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 1–2.

<sup>121</sup> Brownell, “Why Should an Anthropologist Study Sports in China?,” 43–44.

anthropological analysis of sport.”<sup>122</sup> It has held annual meetings every year since its foundation, the proceedings of which were all published. Furthermore the association had published the journals “*Play and Culture*” (1987-1992) and “*Play Theory and Research*” (1993-1994).<sup>123</sup> Since 1998 it publishes the journal “*Play & Culture Studies*.” In addition the association has been issuing three to four newsletters every year. All these publications include many articles on sport activities written from an anthropological perspective and based on anthropological research.<sup>124</sup>

As a second stronghold of sports anthropology we can rate Japan or, to be precise, parts of Japanese academia. In the Land of the Rising Sun, widespread interest in the anthropology of sports, and actual respective research activity, led to the 1988 foundation of a department for sport anthropology in the Japanese Society of Physical Education<sup>125</sup> and later, in 1998, to the foundation of a stand-alone association, the “Japanese Society of Sport Anthropology.” Today this organization has more than one hundred members, holds annual meetings, and runs a website.<sup>126</sup> However, this site and all other publications of the society are unfortunately only in Japanese. Most of the Japanese sport anthropologists focus their research on traditional Japanese, Eastern, and South-Eastern Asian sports, mainly martial arts.<sup>127</sup>

As for European academia, indeed no comparable society or organization has ever been established. However, it was, as in North America, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when, finally, the opportunities provided by the study of sports for socio-cultural anthropologists was understood by also an increasing number of European representatives of that academic discipline. One initiator was German ethnologist Volker Harms who devoted his whole doctoral dissertation, finished in 1969, to the analysis of the term “Spiel” (German for “play” and “game”) and its application in “ethnology.”<sup>128</sup> Three years later, in 1972, Hans Kamphausen, another German ethnologist, published his detailed, “problem-oriented” overview of the study of

---

<sup>122</sup> Blanchard, *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*, 21.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>124</sup> In fact, in this chapter I draw to a large extent on those publications.

<sup>125</sup> Sogawa, review of *The Anthropology of Sport* (Blanchard and Cheska 1985), 302.

<sup>126</sup> I owe special thanks to Shiaki Kondo, my colleague at UAF’s Department of Anthropology, who provided this information. The address of the website is: <http://jssa.asia/> (accessed December 3, 2015).

<sup>127</sup> Blanchard, *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*, 21.

<sup>128</sup> Volker Harms, “Der Terminus „Spiel“ in der Ethnologie,” PhD dissertation, Universität zu Göttingen (Hamburg: Renner, 1969).

“traditional physical exercises among autochthonous peoples,”<sup>129</sup> in which he identified a triple usefulness of the anthropological study of sports:

- (1) As sports in every society are closely linked and interconnected with many other cultural features, they *mirror* the *culture* of the society as a whole. Hence, the study of a society’s sports contributes to the general comprehension of the culture of that particular society.<sup>130</sup>
- (2) Sports’ close interconnectedness with the *main* cultural features of the societies in which they are performed makes them perfectly suitable for cross-cultural studies.
- (3) Together studies on sports in their internal contexts of particular societies *and* in their cross-cultural comparison may shed light on the ‘substance’ (German “*das Wesen*”) and the genesis of sports itself.<sup>131</sup>

This insight into what opportunities the study of sports provides for anthropology was, as it seems, made by many anthropologists at the same time, as in the 1970s a boom of undertaking sports ethnographies on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean simultaneously occurred.<sup>132</sup> It later, however, somewhat abated and the study of sports, as a matter of fact, never made it “from the margins into the mainstream of anthropological concern,” as Canadian sport anthropologist Noel Dyck tried to persuade his readers and probably himself too.<sup>133</sup> The anthropology of sports, however, neither fell back into its pre-1970s life on the fringes, as a constant flow of published related studies can be observed ever since. As a consequence a plethora of new approaches to the anthropological analysis of games and sports were developed, new questions were asked, and new subjects related to sporting activities were dealt with, thus, new debates arose.<sup>134</sup> In what follows I shall deal with those most important and most relevant from today’s perspective.

---

<sup>129</sup> Hans Kamphausen, “Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern: Ein problemorientierter Überblick.” See bibliography.

<sup>130</sup> See section *Sport as a mirror of society*.

<sup>131</sup> Kamphausen, “Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern,” 73.

<sup>132</sup> Cheska, “The Study of Play from Five Anthropological Perspectives,” 22.

<sup>133</sup> Noel Dyck, “Games, Bodies, Celebrations and Boundaries: Anthropological Perspectives on Sport,” in *Games, Sports and Cultures*, ed. Noel Dyck (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 34.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. e.g. Noel Dyck, “Games, Bodies, Celebrations and Boundaries: Anthropological Perspectives on Sport,” 16; and idem, “Introduction,” in *Games, Sports and Cultures*, ed. Noel Dyck (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 3.



## Important relevant contemporary themes, theories, and debates

### *Human play versus animal play*

Edward Norbeck, being himself, in the 1970s, one of the initiators of the above mentioned boom of ethnographic research on play, games and sports, and of modern anthropological analysis of them,<sup>135</sup> saw the reason for this development in the “broad general trend” in that time, “of the growth of science and of related changes of attitudes about the nature of the universe, the human condition, and propriety of behavior,” by which he meant “man’s rediscovery of his animal nature.”<sup>136</sup> He explains:

I mean to say that the educated public [...] has only recently become willing to acknowledge openly that man-animal behavior, such as sexual activity, is a vital part of human existence and something that need not to be disguised, concealed, or kept secret as being unseemly conduct.<sup>137</sup>

Play, Norbeck writes, “is fundamentally man-animal behavior,” of which “[o]nly its specific forms are learned, cultural acts.” The changing atmosphere in that time, as described by him in the quotation given above, also led to a “changing [...] attitude toward play.”<sup>138</sup> He states:

Play becomes less and less an unnecessary frivolity, frailty or sin, something in which we “indulge”. More and more, it is regarded by the average citizen as normal, natural, and necessary human behavior.<sup>139</sup>

Thus, the post-sixties generation finally overcame the age-old, hostile, Christian attitude towards play.

---

<sup>135</sup> Stevens, “Laying the Groundwork for an Anthropology of Play,” 241.

<sup>136</sup> Norbeck, “The Study of Play—Johan Huizinga and Modern Anthropology,” 13.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

Having accepted the principal animal nature of play, anthropologists and other scientists started the quest to discover the differences or the borderline between animal and human play. This is not as simple as one might think. Like those of humans, animals' play activities are also clearly marked by a meta-communicational framing, e.g. the dogs' 'play face,' by which they signal other dogs that it's now not real fighting, not real biting, but play. Likewise, animals clearly have fun when playing. Equally indisputable is that "play builds up the bodies of young animals for the rigors of adulthood, training them in activities necessary for physical survival, such as fighting, hunting, or fleeing when pursued."<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, according to Lavenda, animals' play "aids learning through exploration of the environment and allows for the development of behavioral versatility."<sup>141</sup> Honor is due again to Edward Norbeck, who made it clear that it is the impact, or influence, of human *culture*, which makes the difference.<sup>142</sup> According to him "human play is *conditioned* by *learned* attitudes and *values*."<sup>143</sup> And Florence Stumpf-Frederickson has added that it is precisely this influence of *culture*, which explains the enormous multifariousness of human play.<sup>144</sup>

This becomes most clear when it comes to sports, because animals do play, but they don't do sports. The meaning of the notion of "sport" itself points to its sole human, i.e. *cultural*, character: it derived from the Anglo-Norman and Old French word "desport," meaning amusement, dissipation, disport, joy, relief.<sup>145</sup> Probably no animal plays consciously for a particular purpose, such as to get relief from the hassles of work or other problems, and definitely not for setting a new record or similar motifs of which humans often engage in sports. Only humans are able to set up a host of rules and norms of judgment and to agree upon them.<sup>146</sup> Hence, one may say, it is sports, which distinguishes humans from animals, or, in other words, and to state more precisely than Schiller did, man is only human in the fullest sense of the word when he does sports.

---

<sup>140</sup> Lavenda "Play," 936 (referring to Robert Fagan's book "Animal Play Behavior," published in 1981).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Stevens, "Laying the Groundwork for an Anthropology of Play," 241.

<sup>143</sup> Quoted in Stevens, "Laying the Groundwork for an Anthropology of Play," 241. Emphases mine.

<sup>144</sup> Florence Stumpf-Frederickson, "Sports and the Cultures of Man," in *Sport, Culture and Society*, ed. John W. Loy and Gerald S. Kenyon (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), 89.

<sup>145</sup> *Kleine Enzyklopädie Körperkultur und Sport*, fünfte, neu bearbeitet Auflage, ed. Günter Erbach et al. (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut VEB, 1979), 20.

<sup>146</sup> Frederik Buytendijk, *Wesen und Sinn des Spiels: Das Spielen des Menschen und der Tiere als Erscheinungsform der Lebenstribe* (Berlin: Der Neue Geist, 1934), 120.

## *Play versus work*

The relation, or dichotomy, between play's serious aims and its non-serious character—or vice versa—has been, as mentioned above, a main concern of the majority of play researchers, including anthropologists. Most of them recognize an element of seriousness to be present in every play, but identify their general 'non-seriousness,' their 'as-if character,' and their '*distinction from work*' as to be its kernel or main feature.<sup>147</sup> In this, they, in principle, follow the forefather of all play theories, Herbert Spencer, who already had identified the purposelessness of play in regard to *immediate* struggle for survival. Play does not "subserve, in any *direct* way, the processes conducive to life," he stated.<sup>148</sup>

Marxist scholars, however, have laid weight on the work element of play. They, in principle, have viewed playful activities and games as a preparation for work,<sup>149</sup> e.g. as training for hunting and war, or even that work and play are mutually dependent, at least originally, i.e. in the "Urgesellschaft," in which they formed, according to them, a "dialectical unity."<sup>150</sup> In principle, this is what Aristotle already had argued.<sup>151</sup> Thus, Marxists take in this respect an Aristotelian stand.

The most important contribution of *anthropologists* to this debate is, in my eyes, their discovery that, where the dichotomy between work and play even in Western (European, Christian, work ethic dominated) cultures is not at all clearly defined,<sup>152</sup> it definitely cannot be observed in most of *non-European traditional* cultures.<sup>153</sup> Thus, concerning them, Aristotle, Marx, and their followers were definitely right.

---

<sup>147</sup> Ulf, "Sport bei den Naturvölkern," 15.

<sup>148</sup> Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, 627, emphasis mine. See also the quotes from him above, on p. 18.

<sup>149</sup> Ulf, "Sport bei den Naturvölkern," 15.

<sup>150</sup> Gerhard Lukas, *Die Körperkultur in frühen Epochen der Menschheitsentwicklung* (Berlin: Sportverlag, 1969), 45.

<sup>151</sup> See above, p.16.

<sup>152</sup> That is because even in such societies "work and play are not diametrically opposed experiences. Individuals may experience play at work or even find playful attributes in their routine work." Andrew W. Miracle, "Sports," in *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, ed. David Levinson and Melvin Ember, vol. 4 (New York: Macmillan, 1996), 1248. See also Don Handelman, "A Note on Play," *American Anthropologist* 76, 1 (1974): 67.

<sup>153</sup> Kamphausen, "Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern," 68.

However, as regards particularly sports, many authors consider them as, at least to a certain degree, different from play. For them, sports' normative, highly formalized, and standardized character, and especially their seriousness distinguish them from play. In sports, they argue, toys become equipment, rules become enacted laws, the joy of playing gets replaced by a pressure to win, and the whole activity becomes controlled by supervisory agencies. As a consequence, they say, what was play, becomes "mechanized,"<sup>154</sup> thus loses most of its playful character and turns (back) into a serious activity, not much or not at all different from work, as, for instance Huizinga and German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas bewail.<sup>155</sup> This, however, considering the above mentioned main *anthropological* contribution to this question, is a too narrow, and especially too Eurocentric view.

It is too Eurocentric because such substantial alignment of sports with work, which these authors bewail, occurred only in Europe and North America as a consequence of the process of industrialization. There, in fact, it was at the height of this process, and particularly at the height of its most devastating influence on the lives of the broad masses of (working) people—that is, in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century—when most modern sports were invented or shaped in the ways, which most of them remain until the present day. The "valued qualities" of "discipline, precision, and control" constitutive of this process, that is "to arrive at work punctually and toil for measured periods of time" and "often highly specialized according to the division of labor," and, in addition, the "need for absoluteness" to handle "tools and machines [...] made to fine tolerance," and, of course the "class structure, or hierarchy"—all this had (and still has) its "counterparts" in these sports: accurate time measurements, players specialized in specific positions of a game, irrevocable rules enforced by regulative bodies, and "winners and losers [...] unambiguously clear, outright, and absolute" like the (unequal) social order.<sup>156</sup> These characteristics could and cannot be found to that degree in non-European sports.

---

<sup>154</sup> Friedrich Georg Jünger, *Die Spiele: Ein Schlüssel zu ihrer Deutung* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1953), 215. Cited in Fritz, "Ansatz und Deutung des Spiels in der Ethnologie," 48.

<sup>155</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (1956), 213–14; Jürgen Habermas, "Soziologische Notizen zum Verhältnis von Arbeit und Freizeit," in *Konkrete Vernunft: Festschrift für Erich Rothacker* (Bonn, 1958), 227, cited in Günther Lüschen, "Prolegomena zu einer Soziologie des Sports," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 12 (1960): 507.

<sup>156</sup> All quotes from Ellis Cashmore, *Making Sense of Sports*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Routledge, 1996), 73.

However, albeit this whole process, which was described by German-British sociologist Norbert Elias as the “sportification” of games,<sup>157</sup> went farthest under those typical European (and North American) conditions of industrialization, it was and is not totally absent in non-industrialized societies either. That is because two important forces, which triggered and augmented this process, occurred in many of those societies too. The first one was *urbanization*, which, as Andrew Miracle states,

[w]herever it has occurred [...] has been accompanied by occupational specialization, governmental bureaucracies, large-scale formal architecture, increasingly complex technology, writing, and *sports*.<sup>158</sup>

Therefore it is no wonder that “[i]n the wake of urbanization in Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China, records indicate the presence of wrestling, boxing, racing, swimming, and ball games,”<sup>159</sup> of which many, as we know, were highly formalized early on.

The second force, which impelled this development, appears in Miracle’s statement as one of the features of urbanization, namely “governmental bureaucracies,” in other words: *state control*. Such, however, did not only develop in urbanized societies. Central authorities with increasing bureaucracies in order to discipline their subjects—most importantly to make them regularly pay their taxes and be trained and available for military campaigns at any time—occurred also in non-urbanized polities. The most prominent example of this is perhaps the Great Mongolian Empire, in which competitions in wrestling, archery, and horse racing were organized on a regular basis and with standardized rules.<sup>160</sup>

Yet, notwithstanding the above, it seems Huizinga’s, Habermas’, and others’ criticism of (modern, Western) sports is not—at least not universally—justified, because their criticism derives from a reflection on only *professional* sports, and does not take into account the huge realm of recreational, leisure-time, and semi-professional sports, in which, without doubt, plenty of playfulness can be found. Moreover, it derives, in my eyes, from overemphasizing the

---

<sup>157</sup> Elias, “Die Genese des Sports als soziologisches Problem,” 83; Cashmore, *Making Sense of Sports*, 79.

<sup>158</sup> Miracle, “Sports,” 1249, emphasis mine.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. e.g. chapter 3, pp. 165–66, and chapter 6, pp. 239 and 246.

excesses of professional sports, as for the most part even professional sports, and particularly where we like them most, are still performed in a very playful manner.<sup>161</sup>

This they do despite of the various rules, regulations, formalizations, and bureaucratizations, which together are characterized and labeled either with Elias' notion of '*sportification*,' or as '*institutionalization*,'<sup>162</sup> or as both, and which to a certain degree indeed distinguish most *sports* from *games*: albeit the latter also have rules, these are often spontaneous, only valid for one time, sometimes quickly forgotten, and in general of a simpler character than those of sports.<sup>163</sup> Yet, frequently, it is precisely ingenious athletes' playing *with* the sophisticated rules, established for their sports, that enchants spectators, and brings victory to these athletes. What they are doing is, for Bourdieu, therefore "rather like musical work," because, as he states,

it is both the musical score (the rules of the game, etc.), and also the various competing interpretations (and a whole set of sedimented interpretations from the past); and each new interpreter is confronted by this, more unconsciously than consciously, when he proposes 'his' interpretations.<sup>164</sup>

Thus, not just hard *workout* but no less *creativity* and ingenuity are needed for success in sports. Hence, they indeed are both: work and play.

### ***Fun versus fight (Definition of sport)***

An element which at first sight appears to be even more 'serious' than work, and not playful at all, namely that of *fighting*, nonetheless seems to be a basic feature of sports, because, when broadly defined, it is tantamount to the element of *competition*, which was identified as a constitutive feature of games already by Spencer as well as Huizinga.<sup>165</sup> In sports, as Edouard Claparède has put it, one is fighting against others, or against oneself, or against both, hence, in

---

<sup>161</sup> Cf. John W. Loy, "The Nature of Sport: A Definitional Effort," in *Sport, Culture and Society*, ed. John W. Loy and Gerald S. Kenyon (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), 57.

<sup>162</sup> Coakley, *Sport in Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 11.

<sup>163</sup> Loy, "The Nature of Sport: A Definitional Effort," 62–64.

<sup>164</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Programme for the Sociology of Sport," in *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 163 (cited in Dyck, "Games, Bodies, Celebrations and Boundaries: Anthropological Perspectives on Sport," 22).

<sup>165</sup> See above, pp.19–20 and 25, respectively.

general, against a *difficulty*.<sup>166</sup> Thus, for Kamphausen sport is characterized by three basic elements or features: (1) play, (2) physical exercise, (3) fight (or “struggle”, as the German term “Kampf” that Kamphausen uses may translate into English as both “fight” and “struggle”).<sup>167</sup>

This conceptualization—or definition—of sport, remains basically valid for most of sports researchers today also. For instance, more than 30 years after Kamphausen, Schultz and Lavenda worded it only slightly differently in their summary of anthropological research on sports, which they provided in their textbook about cultural anthropology. For them it is “*conflict*” which “becomes the whole point of the [sportive] activity.”<sup>168</sup> However, “[c]onflict in games and sports,” as they point out by using a quote of Janet Lever “is different from conflict in ordinary life,”<sup>169</sup> as in them “[competitors *agree*] to strive for an incompatible goal” that “only one opponent can win.”<sup>170</sup> This, in fact, can serve as a concise definition of *sport*.

About this definition—in sharp contrast to what we have observed in regard to the definition of *play*—an astonishing widespread consensus prevails. With only, if at all, some attributive addenda—of which however, in my eyes, a crucial one is their formalized and institutionalized character—everybody agrees upon that sports can be defined as “gamelike” activities “having rules, a competitive element, and requiring some form of physical exertion,” as Kendall Blanchard has put it just as concisely.<sup>171</sup> More comprehensively, but essentially identically, he and Alyce Cheska defined sport as:

a physically exertive activity that is aggressively competitive within constraints imposed by definitions and rules. A component of culture, it is ritually patterned, gamelike, and of varying amounts of play, work, and leisure. In addition, sport can be viewed as having both athletic and nonathletic variations, *athletic* referring to those activities requiring the greater amount of physical exertion.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>166</sup> Cited in Kamphausen, “Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern,” 80.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>168</sup> Emily A. Schultz and Robert H. Lavenda, *Cultural Anthropology: A Perspective on the Human Condition*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 148, emphasis and addition mine.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

<sup>170</sup> Janet Lever, *Soccer Madness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 3, cited in Schultz and Lavenda, *Cultural Anthropology: A Perspective on the Human Condition*, 148.

<sup>171</sup> Blanchard, *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*, 9.

<sup>172</sup> Blanchard and Cheska, *The Anthropology of Sport*, 60.

I think that the success of this definition is due to its openness: it does not require one to either draw a clear distinction between play and sport or between sport and work and also not between sport and fight. Particularly socio-anthropological sports analysis such a broad definition suits best, because, as German anthropologist Ingrid Kummels has stated,

[i]f [...] the changing place of sport phenomena in diverse societies and cultures over time are to be captured and understood, a broad and inclusive definition of sport as physically based competitive activities or physical cultures should be adopted. Such a definition should allow for the inclusion of forms that do not match the ideal type of competitive physical activity. Generally using a broad ‘sports’ category, the anthropology of sport is able to focus on the transitions and overlaps of physical cultures, which may accentuate secular, ritual, militarist or leisure aspects.<sup>173</sup>

This in my eyes makes perfect sense, as one major, if not the most constitutive feature of sports, is their fluid character: they can be very serious, combative, or even violent activities, just as they can be very peaceful, harmless, or simply funny activities. And they can very quickly change from one into the other and back again.

However, the widest spectrum from beastly brutality to peaceful ‘fair play’ sports show when viewed from a diachronic perspective. That’s because they reflect the *civilizing process* mankind has underwent, as Elias has denoted the principally steady, though sometimes interrupted or even backsliding process from the antiquity up to the present day of people’s increasing repugnance of violence.<sup>174</sup> Ancient Greek wrestling, for example, was of quite a different character than today’s Olympic wrestling. Back then, breaking a combatant’s bones, or even killing him, occurred frequently and was not a reason for disqualification, but for earning victory, as the wrestling bouts only ended when one of the combatants was forced to discontinue fighting, which made the other the winner. There is even a case reported in which one wrestler, despite dying on the spot because his opponent had strangled him (too) heavily, was still declared the winner because

---

<sup>173</sup> Ingrid Kummels, “Anthropological Perspectives on Sport and Culture: Against Sports as the Essence of Western Modernity,” in *Sport Across Asia: Politics, Cultures, and Identities*, ed. Katrin Bromber, Birgit Krawietz and Joseph Maguire (Routledge: New York, 2013), 17.

<sup>174</sup> In detail described by him in his seminal book *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation: soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen* (Bern: Francke, 1969); first English edition: Norbert Elias, *The civilizing process* (New York: Urizen Books, 1978). See bibliography.



he could, before he died, break his opponents toes, which in turn caused that one so much pain that he had to discontinue fighting before the other one died. Hence the body of the dead wrestler was crowned with laurel and declared the winner.<sup>175</sup> Another example is the medieval ball games between villages, for instance in England, which were much more a ferocious unrestrained brawl than what we, today, would call a game.<sup>176</sup>

The relationship between sports and the most dreadful form of fighting, that is *war*, was also an object of anthropological investigation. Richard Sipes carried out a cross-cultural comparison between ten societies with “infrequent or no war” and ten societies with “frequent or continual war” and could detect that combative sports were far more frequent in the ten war-prone societies than they were in the societies he categorized as peaceable. In nine of the latter category such sports could not be found at all, whereas they were lacking in only one of the societies with “frequent or continual war.”<sup>177</sup> From this result he concluded that

[w]ar and combative sports are found to be positively correlated, thus discrediting aggression as a drive in humans and supporting it as a learned cultural behavior pattern,<sup>178</sup>

and that

[w]ar and combative sports therefore do not, as often claimed, act as alternative channels for the discharge of accumulable aggressive tensions. Rather than being functional alternatives, war and combative sports activities in a society appear to be components of a broader culture pattern.<sup>179</sup>

---

<sup>175</sup> This wrestler was Arrhichion of Phigalia and this tragedy happened to him at the Olympic Games of 564 BCE. See e.g. Elias, “Die Genese des Sports als soziologisches Problem,” 89.

<sup>176</sup> Elias, “Die Genese des Sports als soziologisches Problem,” 84; Henning Eichberg, “The Enclosure of the Body. The Historical Relativity of ‘Health’, ‘Nature’ and the Environment of Sport,” in *Body Cultures: Essays on Sport, Space, and Identity* by Henning Eichberg, ed. John Bale and Chris Philo (London: Routledge, 1998), 48–50; Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 52.

<sup>177</sup> Richard G. Sipes, “War, Sports and Aggression: An Empirical Test of Two Rival Theories,” *American Anthropologist* 75, 1 (1973): 69.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

Sipes' findings were corroborated by Joseph Royce's study "Play in Violent and Non-Violent Cultures," undertaken—as was Sipes'—in the spirit of Roberts, Arth and Bush,<sup>180</sup> but using, in addition, Caillois' classification of games. In his study, Royce reveals significant associations of the 'violent' culture he studied—the Madurese<sup>181</sup>—with games of the *agôn* and *alea* type, as they practically solely played games of these two types, and the 'non-violent' culture he studied—the Semai<sup>182</sup>—with *mimicry* and *ilinx* games, which they practically solely played.<sup>183</sup> This together with other studies also reveals that,

[a]lthough sports and sportlike activities have been present in many societies for thousands of years, they are not found in all societies. There are some societies in which competition is avoided rather than encouraged. [...] There are also some cultures [...] in which competition exists but sports are unknown.<sup>184</sup>

Thus, there have been societies which constitute counter examples to Sipes' findings and conclusions. "Pre-Columbian Cherokee, for example," as Andrew Miracle pointed to, "used stickball contests to settle disputes rather than resorting to warfare."<sup>185</sup> And wrestling matches have decided, for instance, conflicts over rice field boundaries among the Ifugao of the Philippines<sup>186</sup> and conflicts over pasture lands usage as well as other matters among the Buryats and Mongols.<sup>187</sup> These peoples believed that the wrestlers were influenced by their ancestor spirits, who in fact decided the matter.<sup>188</sup> On the other hand the Buryats and Mongols also clearly regarded the *sport* of wrestling as training for *war*; and with that they did not stand alone, as wrestling was, for instance, part of the regular military training already in ancient India,<sup>189</sup> as are

---

<sup>180</sup> See above, pp. 32–33.

<sup>181</sup> That is the inhabitants of Madura, an Island north of Java, Indonesia, numbering about two and a half million. Joseph Royce, "Play in Violent and Non-Violent Cultures," *Anthropos* 75, 5/6 (1980): 801.

<sup>182</sup> The Semai are a small Senoi-language speaking group of Central Malaysia, numbering about 20,000. Royce, "Play in Violent and Non-Violent Cultures," 802.

<sup>183</sup> Royce, "Play in Violent and Non-Violent Cultures," 819–20.

<sup>184</sup> Miracle, "Sports," 1249.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 1250.

<sup>186</sup> Stumpf-Frederickson, "Sports and the Cultures of Man," 87, 92; Kamphausen, "Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern," 65; Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 64.

<sup>187</sup> See below, p. 240.

<sup>188</sup> Kamphausen, "Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern," 65.

<sup>189</sup> S. H. Deshpande, *Physical Education in Ancient India* (Dehli: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1992), 202–3.

a host of martial arts in most military forces today. Many sports seem indeed to originate in military activities.<sup>190</sup>

The relationships between competitive sports, war, and aggression—regardless whether the latter is seen as a “drive in humans” or as “a learned cultural behavior pattern”—are, however, by no means always as simple, direct, and conclusive as one might think. The Gahuku-Gama, an ethnic group of Papua New Guinea, for instance, took up the competitive sport of soccer from their colonizers, but tried to come to a tie in every match, so that neither team won, even if that took them several days of playing. By this they reproduced in their soccer *games* the pattern of their traditional village *wars*, in which likewise nobody ever won.<sup>191</sup> This shows first that non-competitiveness doesn’t necessarily equal peacefulness,<sup>192</sup> and second that a competitive sport doesn’t necessarily have to produce winners and losers or—in the words of Levi-Strauss—a “status asymmetry,” but can equally become a means for achieving symmetry, an attribute which the great French anthropologist has ascribed to rituals.<sup>193</sup>

These varied, fluid, versatile, or even contradictory characteristics of sports—oscillating between such extreme poles as fun and fight, play and ritual, or even peace and war—have been causing difficulties in their comprehension and in theory construction about them<sup>194</sup> and have, as mentioned, led many anthropologists to not even taking up this challenge. In the last three to four decades, however, not a few anthropologists finally took it up. In the following I provide a brief overview over the most important and most influential theoretical approaches developed by them.

### *Neo-evolutionist approaches and their critics*

In fairness to the German (racist) evolutionists mentioned above, it must not be concealed that also scientists from other countries held similar views up to the 1980s. That late, for instance, the view that there is a correlation between ‘simple’ societies with only simple or no games played, and between ‘complex’ societies with complex games and elaborated sport competitions, and a

---

<sup>190</sup> Miracle, “Sports,” 1250; Cashmore, *Making Sense of Sports*, 91.

<sup>191</sup> Eichberg, *Leistung, Spannung, Geschwindigkeit*, 17.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 32–33. See also below, p. 71.

<sup>194</sup> Ulf, “Sport bei den Naturvölkern,” 18.

linear evolutionary progression from the first to the latter, was held also by American researchers. Alyce Cheska cites, as examples, the two sociologists Harry Edwards and Hilmi Ibrahim, who published their respective works in the mid-1970s.<sup>195</sup>

In anthropology it was the extensive cross-cultural studies of Roberts and Sutton-Smith, undertaken just slightly earlier<sup>196</sup> and revealing—or rather *arguing* for—a similar picture, which became to some extent influential in the discipline. Their studies showed statistical correlations between certain cultural traits and the presence or absence of certain games. They interpreted the results of their studies as a proof of the ‘simple society - simple games’ and ‘complex society - complex games’ equations,<sup>197</sup> but one has to emphasize that these, if at all, are just *statistical* correlations, not generic ones, because counter-examples can easily be found. Kamphausen, for instance, disproves the general validity of this assertion by using the example of the Australian Aborigines. They, though commonly regarded as ‘primitive,’ play a lot. This is true also for the Inuit who, in addition, live under very difficult natural conditions, but nevertheless love to play and do it very often.<sup>198</sup> Furthermore Kamphausen shows that an ethnic group’s type of economy does not determine how much its members play or which types of play. For instance, Melanesians play little in general, whereas Polynesians play a lot and in a wide variety, although both ethnic groups live in the exact same environment and share the same subsistence pattern.<sup>199</sup> Hence one can conclude that much more than anything else it is the particular *traditions* or *cultures* which determine groups’ play behaviors, including their sports.

### ***Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches***

As mentioned above, the classical Marxist approach to all play activities including sports, is that they are closely linked with work and can, hence, only be analyzed in their relation to work or, in more Marxist terms, in their relation to the productive forces and the modes of production. As a consequence, in the Soviet Union and other countries, in which by changing the modes of

---

<sup>195</sup> See Cheska, “The Study of Play from Five Anthropological Perspectives,” 19.

<sup>196</sup> e.g. John M. Roberts and Brian Sutton-Smith, “Cross-Cultural and Psychological Study of Games,” *Behavior Science Notes* 3 (1966): 131–44; and Brian Sutton-Smith and John M. Roberts, “The Cross-Cultural and Psychological Study of Games,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 6 (1971): 79–87.

<sup>197</sup> Brian Sutton-Smith, “Towards an Anthropology of Play,” 225.

<sup>198</sup> Kamphausen, “Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern,” 83.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 84–85.

production has been tried to begin the formation of a classless society, sports were intensively utilized for that goal too. Therefore ‘bourgeois’ sports were criticized, discouraged, and even partially forbidden in the Soviet Union in the first years after the October Revolution, as for many revolutionaries the competitive character of these sports did not comply with the aim of creating an egalitarian society.<sup>200</sup> Moreover, they considered them as “an opiate that, like religion, dulls people to their exploitation.”<sup>201</sup> This view, however, did not prevail very long. Already from the mid-1920s onwards, sports were utilized in a very competitive manner also in the Soviet Union, namely in the pursuit to prove the Soviet ‘socialist’ society’s superiority over Western capitalism.<sup>202</sup> As a consequence, also any sport related Marxist-Leninist *research* had to serve just this goal.<sup>203</sup>

Thus, from an anthropological perspective, the only Marxist, or, in fact, neo-Marxist contribution to the study and analysis of sports as a *social* phenomenon worth mentioning, is the application of the concept of *hegemony* on ‘capitalist’ sports, which was undertaken most prominently by Jennifer and John Hargreaves<sup>204</sup> and Alan Klein<sup>205</sup> in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The concept of hegemony was developed by Italian neo-Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci while incarcerated for political reasons for more than a decade, from the mid-1920s until his death in 1937. Like other Marxist thinkers, Gramsci searched for reasons for the astonishing longevity of the capitalist system in defiance of its obvious contradictions, iniquities,

---

<sup>200</sup> Knut Karlsrud, “Physical Activity, Activity for Life, in Soviet Caucasus. A Sport-Anthropological Study in the Soviet Caucasus,” in *Sport, Culture, Society: International, Historical, and Sociological Perspectives: Proceedings of the VIII Commonwealth and International Conference on Sport, Physical Education, Dance, Recreation, and Health: Conference ‘86 Glasgow, 18–23 July*, ed. J. A. Mangan and R. B. Small (London: Spon, 1986), 99.

<sup>201</sup> Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 125.

<sup>202</sup> Karlsrud, “Physical Activity, Activity for Life, in Soviet Caucasus,” 100–101; Peter Sendlak, “Leibesübungen und Sport in der Sowjetunion,” in *Geschichte der Leibesübungen*, vol. 4, ed. Horst Ueberhorst (Berlin: Bartels- und Wernitz-Verlag, 1972), 92–100.

<sup>203</sup> Loy and Kenyon, “The Sociology of Sport: An Emerging Field,” 9. For more details see Henry W. Morton, “Soviet Sport in the 1960’s,” in *Sport, Culture and Society*, ed. John W. Loy and Gerald S. Kenyon (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969); idem, “Sport in Soviet Russia,” in *Sport and Society*, ed. John T. Talamini and Charles H. Page (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973); James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977 and idem, “Sport and Communism—on the Example of the USSR,” in *Sport, Culture and Ideology*, ed. Jennifer Hargreaves (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982). See bibliography.

<sup>204</sup> John Hargreaves, “Sport, Culture and Ideology,” in *Sport, Culture and Ideology*, ed. Jennifer Hargreaves (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982). See bibliography.

<sup>205</sup> Alan Klein, *Sugarball: the American Game, the Dominican Dream* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). See bibliography.

and numerous cyclical crises properly predicted by Marx.<sup>206</sup> Gramsci detected that the bourgeoisie, or ruling class, not only owns the means of production and thus controls the *economy*, but has also successfully created an *ideological* and *cultural hegemony*, by which “indirect rather than direct economic or military means” it maintains its power.<sup>207</sup> As all areas of society and of people’s lives are pervaded with the capitalist ideology, an all-encompassing and omnipresent conceptual framework has been created, through which people practically exclusively perceive the world around them, and their own lives as well. This has created “a genuinely felt set of beliefs, ideas, values and principles, all of which work in a supportive way for the *status quo* and hence appear as common sense.”<sup>208</sup> That is why people wear their chains voluntarily,<sup>209</sup> and hence the capitalist system lives on. “According to Gramsci an entire apparatus is responsible for diffusing ideas that complement and encourage consensus,” writes British sport sociologist Ellis Cashmore. “These include the Church, education, the media, political institutions and [...] *sports*.”<sup>210</sup>

The Hargreaveses, Klein, and also others, view sports in this Gramscian way, that is, as part of ideological and cultural hegemonies, or in relation to processes of the creation of such hegemonies. They “try to explain how and why the domination of a particular class comes to be expressed through sporting practice in such a way that its values become part of our notions of what is “natural” or “common sense”.”<sup>211</sup> This approach, I believe, is even more suitable for today’s post-Soviet world of a capitalist economy, that is practically established worldwide, but which is challenged in evermore places and more and more often, but not so much concerning its *economic* principles but its *cultural* hegemony.

### ***Functionalist approaches***

In a broad sense the Marxist, Soviet, and neo-Marxist conceptualizations can run as *functionalist* approaches, as they all focus on sports’ *functions* for a society—or for a certain part of it, e.g. its

---

<sup>206</sup> S. J. Parry, “Hegemony and Sport,” in *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, ed. William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier (Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1988), 433.

<sup>207</sup> Cashmore, *Making Sense of Sports*, 88.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Parry, “Hegemony and Sport,” 433–34. Cf. also Cashmore, *Making Sense of Sports*, 78.

<sup>210</sup> Cashmore, *Making Sense of Sports*, 88, emphasis mine.

<sup>211</sup> Parry, “Hegemony and Sport,” 436.

ruling class—or, in other words, on “how sport helps satisfy system needs.”<sup>212</sup> These approaches, however, constitute only a small portion of sports anthropological research resting upon functionalist views, as anthropologists have detected and dealt with a much wider variety of functions of play.<sup>213</sup> The Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches belong to those which focus on, as American sport sociologist Jay J. Coakley has put it, the

- “*pattern maintenance* and *tension management* functions” of sports.<sup>214</sup>

In what follows I shall list and shortly describe other functions of sports on which functionalist approaches have been focused.

However, before doing so, it is important to note first that most of these functions cannot be sharply dissociated from one another, as they often are akin or overlapping and appear simultaneously. Second, and at least as important, it needs to be pointed out that the application of a too simplistic functionalism makes it inappropriate for analyzing sports (and any other social activity too). Too simplistic a functionalist approach is when it “is based on the assumption that the needs of the individuals and groups within a society are the same as the needs of the society as a whole,” as Jay Coakley aptly describes the “major problem” all too frequently occurring with functionalism.<sup>215</sup> In essence this “major problem” is, as Coakley continues, that

[t]he existence of *conflict* between groups in society is ignored by simply assuming that if something is good for one group—especially the dominant group in society—it must be good for all others.<sup>216</sup>

Thus, albeit analyzing, which functions sports do or can have in a society, makes sense and is important for their understanding, one needs to be cautious to not draw conclusions that are too simplistic and to overlook that sports, like any other social activity, are “the creation of *people* interacting with one another,” and who usually “promote their *own* interests and the interests of the groups to which they belong.”<sup>217</sup> Gramscian, neo-Marxist theory, for instance, does not overlook this, and therefore constitutes an exemplary case of an appropriate or ‘cautious’

---

<sup>212</sup> Coakley, *Sport in Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 23.

<sup>213</sup> Cheska, “The Study of Play from Five Anthropological Perspectives,” 21.

<sup>214</sup> Coakley, *Sport in Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 25, emphases mine.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

functionalist approach. In the following list and descriptions of sports' possible functions I shall point to some more such approaches.

- Sports as means for *constructing, strengthening, and reinforcing identities*:

A very concise delineation of the principle which underlies this function is that of sport historians Tara Magdalinski and Timothy Chandler. In their introduction to the volume "*With God on their Side: Sport in the service of religion*", edited by them and published in 2002, they write:

Simply learning appropriate social behavior, however, is not generally sufficient for sustaining a community. Members of any social group must *rehearse* and *perform* their identity,

and

identity must be reinforced through education and repetitive, and ritualistic, cultural practice.<sup>218</sup>

Due to the particular focus of their book Magdalinski and Chandler refer mainly to religious identities but, as they rightly state, this holds true for "*any* social group." Thus, not only religious, but also ethnic, national, racial, gender, regional, local, occupational, and all other identities need to be constantly reinforced by means of "repetitive, and ritualistic, cultural practice." For this, sports, as being highly ritualistic as well as collectivity inspiring activities, are of course eminently suitable. And the great number and variety of sports, and also that they can be performed in endless different ways, suit them as excellent boundary markers, which help groups to maintain their distinctive identities, a property of sports which is of particular importance for minorities of any kind, and thus frequently employed by members of such all over the globe and over the course of time.<sup>219</sup>

---

<sup>218</sup> Tara Magdalinski and Timothy J. L. Chandler, "With God on their Side: An Introduction," in *With God on their Side: Sport in the Service of Religion*, ed. Tara Magdalinski and Timothy J. L. Chandler (London: Routledge, 2002), 7–8, emphases mine.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 and 5–6; Harris and Park, "Introduction to the Sociocultural Study of Play, Games, and Sports," 25; Miracle, "Sports," 1249.



This, however, can equally be said also about countless socially *dominant* groups and institutions, like churches, political parties, and state administrations. Thus, what can be frequently observed is

- sports' utilization for *promoting* and *perpetuating ideologies* and for *political purposes*, a capability, which grounds on
- sports' high potential for *developing* and *maintaining group solidarity* or *community*, i.e. that they serve "*integration functions*." <sup>220</sup>

History has sufficiently proven that sports can be used and abused for promoting a wide variety of ideologies (including religions) and for an equally wide variety of political purposes. This was best put by Noel Dyck, who just succinctly states that "politics of identity [...] often figure prominently in sport." <sup>221</sup> Concerning sports' integrative potential, I think Ellis Cashmore got to the heart of the matter, when he stated that

[s]port is a great developer of social solidarity: it makes people feel they belong to a strong homogeneous collectivity which has a presence far greater than any single person. <sup>222</sup>

This holds true for many other social activities also—religious rituals, state holiday celebrations, party conventions, etc.—as well as for many, if not all, "homogeneous collectivities," and regardless whether they are already consolidated or only in their making. For the latter again sports can be utilized, as Andrew Miracle points out in regard to American social history:

For example, in the United States, sports assumed increasing importance in the late nineteenth century as public rituals that could integrate the heterogeneous immigrant populations into the corporate economy of the emerging industrial nation. <sup>223</sup>

Thus, this is a good example for a case in which the *identity constructing*, the *community developing*, and the *tension managing* functions—or potentials—of sports appeared altogether. Moreover it demonstrates that

- sports may play a significant role in *acculturation* or *assimilation* processes.

---

<sup>220</sup> Coakley, *Sport in Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 25, emphases mine.

<sup>221</sup> Dyck, "Introduction," 5.

<sup>222</sup> Cashmore, *Making Sense of Sports*, 93.

<sup>223</sup> Miracle, "Sports," 1250.

This in turn points to that

- sports' frequently play a prominent role in *socialization* and *enculturation* processes, and—as part of these—in *education*.

This they do, because “play, games, and sports provide opportunities for individuals to examine, interpret, and expand their understanding of their culture.”<sup>224</sup> In them “children can imitate adult activities and learn without the fear of mistake and subsequent repercussions;”<sup>225</sup> and for adults, to quote once more Andrew Miracle,

[sport] is a transmitter of cultural meaning. Participation in sports reinforces status positions and social roles, common understandings of authority and cultural values.<sup>226</sup>

“That is, in games,” as Donald Calhoun sums up, “children *model* and adults *reinforce* in symbolic, and therefore *safe*, form the activities and attitudes important in their culture.”<sup>227</sup> Therefore, sports, as British social anthropologist Jeremy MacClancy states, “may be used [...] to give physical expression to certain social values and to act as a means of *reflecting* on those values.”<sup>228</sup>

This, in turn, points to that sports may not only function as means for *maintaining* patterns, that is for upholding the social *status quo*, but that also, and frequently at the same time,

- sports can provide opportunities for *innovation* and *social change*.

In other words, sports can be a means for triggering social change. They can do so, because like any play or game also sports, though most strictly limited and restricted by rules, nonetheless have to concede to the players a significant level of freedom of decision and leeway for creativity, because otherwise they could not be played meaningfully and particularly no competition would be possible. That is because, although sports are “governed [...] by rules and officials, [...] the actual *forms* of play and athletic performances [...] are *not* substantially

---

<sup>224</sup> Harris and Park, “Introduction to the Sociocultural Study of Play, Games, and Sports,” 22.

<sup>225</sup> Droulias, “Comprehensive Paper,” 6. Concerning the functions of play, games, and sports for socializing and educating children, it needs to be said that in anthropology they have not been researched very much with a particular focus on *sports*. The research so far undertaken deals almost only with *play* and *games*, but not with *sports*. Thus the anthropology of children's *sports* remains a field insufficiently studied.

<sup>226</sup> Miracle, “Sports,” 1250.

<sup>227</sup> Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 62, emphases mine.

<sup>228</sup> MacClancy, “Sport, Identity and Ethnicity,” 7, emphasis mine.

prescribed by official codes or regulations.”<sup>229</sup> For example, the basic rules in soccer are only that one has to drive the ball without touching it with one’s hands and without hurting any other player into the goal of the opposite team; but *how* this is done is completely up to the given players in every given game. Hence, enormous, nay even infinite, latitude of possibilities and choices is conceded to them. And this holds true for any other sport as well, thus they definitely constitute big “outlets for creativity,” as Stumpf-Frederickson has put it.<sup>230</sup>

This creative power of play and games was already detected by Huizinga and Caillois.<sup>231</sup> The latter came to the conclusion “that games may “reinforce established values” or they may “contradict and flout them”,” as Harris and Park aptly synopsised the French scholar’s thoughts on this.<sup>232</sup> This dual function of games, and thus of sports too, meaning “their potential for the promotion of cultural stability or the facilitation of cultural change,”<sup>233</sup> was confirmed thereafter by most sport anthropologists and sociologists, but most of them stressed, in fact, the latter. The most prominent of them was perhaps Victor Turner, who contended that participants of rituals, art performances, games, and similar expressive activities, including sports, may enter states of “liminality,” that is, as again Harris and Park have well explicated, “may find oneself at the edges or margins of conventional culture, where creatively novel combinations of cultural elements may occur.”<sup>234</sup> Andreas Droulias combined this theory of Turner with views of American sport anthropologists John MacAloon and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi:

Play can be “anti-structural,” in the sense that it allows for the breaking down of rules, norms and status expectations, but also “protostructural” since it suggests new ways of experiencing ‘serious’ life.<sup>235</sup>

---

<sup>229</sup> Dyck, “Games, Bodies, Celebrations and Boundaries,” 21, emphases mine.

<sup>230</sup> Stumpf-Frederickson, “Sports and the Cultures of Man,” 87–88.

<sup>231</sup> See e.g. the third definitional feature in Caillois’ definition of play, above on p. 34.

<sup>232</sup> Harris and Park, “Introduction to the Sociocultural Study of Play, Games, and Sports,” 7. The quotes stem from Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 66.

<sup>233</sup> Harris and Park, “Introduction to the Sociocultural Study of Play, Games, and Sports,” 7.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>235</sup> Droulias, “Comprehensive Paper,” 8. In regard to the “anti-structural” character of play he refers to Victor Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: an Essay in Comparative Symbolology,” *Rice University Studies* 60, 3 (1974): 60; and in regard to its “proto-structural” character to John MacAloon and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “Deep Play and the Flow Experience in Rock Climbing,” in *Play, Games and Sports in Cultural Contexts*, ed. Janet C. Harris and Roberta J. Park (Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers. 1983), 377.

In this regard Brian Sutton-Smith pointed to what one could call the various ‘role plays’ commonly performed in games when he stated that

we have in games behavior in which conventional roles are mocked; we have in games an unconventional access to roles; and we have in games access to novelty *within* role.<sup>236</sup>

Thus, they provide “an opportunity for the possibility of change under *the guise of persistence*,” as American anthropologist Frank Salamone has very accurately encapsulated the quintessential matter here.<sup>237</sup> In my eyes this is a crucial feature of all games, and particularly of sports.

It is, however, important to stress that the novelties created in the fields of sports, or in connection with them, are by no means always of the kind desired by everyone. As Ellis Cashmore points out, this is because “if sport was an instrument,” and, I think, that it has become clear that it is, “it had two cutting edges for as well as carving out new patterns of order it was also responsible for outbreaks of disorder.”<sup>238</sup> Football hooliganism is only one example for this, as, of course, any other “mocking of conventional roles,” “contradicting and flouting of established values,” and “breaking down of rules, norms and status expectations” in sports rarely proceed without conflict either. Fortunately though, in most cases they proceed less violently than football hooliganism usually does. In fact, sports’ potential for innovation and social change is greatest where such processes proceed peacefully, slowly, and nearly unnoticed “under the guise of persistence.”

Two more features not mentioned so far significantly contribute to these processes of triggering social changes by sports. I have pointed to one of them in an earlier publication. It is that in sports innovations are developed by combining “*collective* experiences” with the “relative *individual* freedom” conceded to its participants.<sup>239</sup> It is this powerful combination, when the aims and actions of the individual merge with those of the community—which is in essence

---

<sup>236</sup> Sutton-Smith, “Towards an Anthropology of Play,” 228, emphasis mine.

<sup>237</sup> Frank Salamone, “Religion as Play—Bori, a Friendly ‘Witchdoctor’,” in *The Study of Play: Problems and Prospects*, edited by David F. Lancy and Allan Tindall (West Point: Leisure Press, 1977), 166, emphasis mine.

<sup>238</sup> Cashmore, *Making Sense of Sports*, 77.

<sup>239</sup> See Krist, “Where Going Back is a Step Forward,” 111, emphases newly set.

tantamount to what Victor Turner has described as the experience of “communitas”<sup>240</sup>—which makes the outcomes of such processes extraordinarily sustainable.<sup>241</sup>

The second feature contributes in particular to this extraordinary sustainability. It is the central role the human body plays in these processes and especially the moving body or “human movement patterns,”<sup>242</sup> which, if changed, of course eminently influence—that is *change*—the culture as a whole. This body-culture link has been stressed by several eminent sport anthropologists, e.g. by Susan Brownell and Robert and Linda Sands,<sup>243</sup> but most pivotally by the leading German sport anthropologist Henning Eichberg. His take on this became very influential, wherefore I will discuss it in detail in a separate section below.<sup>244</sup>

In addition to these functions and potentials of sports I have dealt with so far, several more, and, in a sense, more specific ones, can be identified. The first of these is

- sports’ function for *improving health* and *fitness* and their *recreational* and *entertainment* value.

That sports, when all precautions against injuries are taken, are good for the health and fitness of those who do them is obvious and cannot be doubted, apart from perhaps some excesses in professional sports. This value of sports has thus been recognized a million times and early on, for instance, to mention just one example, in ancient India.<sup>245</sup> And as regards sports’ *entertainment* value, we can even include professional sports, as to provide amusement is their *raison d’être* and many professional sports events indeed accomplish it, as shown by their huge attendance and viewing figures. This function of sports is therefore of great social significance<sup>246</sup>—a fact which nobody seriously denies anymore.

Secondly, we must address

---

<sup>240</sup> See Victor Turner, “Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas,” in *Play, Games and Sports in Cultural Contexts*, ed. Janet C. Harris and Roberta J. Park (Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1983), 327–59.

<sup>241</sup> Cf. also Miracle, “Sports,” 1251.

<sup>242</sup> Robert R. Sands, “Anthropology Revisits Sport through Human Movement,” in *The Anthropology of Sport and Human Movement: A Biocultural Perspective*, ed. Robert R. Sands and Linda R. Sands (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 32.

<sup>243</sup> Brownell, “Why Should an Anthropologist Study Sports in China?” 59; Robert R. Sands and Linda R. Sands, “Preface,” in *The Anthropology of Sport and Human Movement: A Biocultural Perspective*, ed. Robert R. Sands and Linda R. Sands (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), viii.

<sup>244</sup> See below in section “Body cultures’ comeback”, pp. 82–86.

<sup>245</sup> See Deshpande, *Physical Education in Ancient India*, 288.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. Miracle, “Sports,” 1250.

- sports' *economic* functions.

Today the sport industry is one of the largest and most profitable branches of the global market. True, this is a fairly recent development, but on local and regional levels sports competitions that attract large crowds, have often provided opportunities for retailing consumer goods, also in earlier times. The sports holidays of the Buryats are an example of this.

Further above I have already mentioned and dealt with

- sports' *military* functions.<sup>247</sup>

Of course sports have been used for training warriors and soldiers not only among the Buryats and Mongols and people in ancient India, and of course also not only wrestling and other martial arts have been used for this purpose, but many other sports as well. Today there is no army in which sports do not play a central role in combat training.

It is important to also note that

- sports provide excellent opportunities for *gaining social recognition* and *enhancing* one's personal *prestige*.

This is, of course, a social function of great importance, as in every society such opportunities have to be provided for its members, and especially in such, in which social mobility is very limited. Thus, this function of sports may, at least to some extent, also be categorized as pattern maintaining or even as that "opiate," which "dulls people to their exploitation," as Marxist and neo-Marxist analyses would, not at all wrongly, suggest. Through sports, otherwise disadvantaged or even stigmatized members of society can sometimes become social and/or political elites, and thus disrupt the pattern on the surface, but essentially support it.

As a very tangible function of sports, it has to be mentioned that in several societies they have been used as a

- *means* for *finding* or *choosing spouses*.

This, for instance, has been reported for the Dukawa of Nigeria, where girls, when watching wrestling competitions of men, would strew flowers over their chosen ones among them, after which these wrestlers' fathers would immediately start marriage negotiations with the girls' parents.<sup>248</sup> Another example is Ethiopian wrestlers who "improve their chances on the marriage

---

<sup>247</sup> See above, p. 53.

<sup>248</sup> Stumpf-Frederickson, "Sports and the Cultures of Man," 93–94; Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 64.

market,” because they “have the reputation of being strong, skilful and diligent.”<sup>249</sup> In ancient India sometimes the most skilful archers could win a bride,<sup>250</sup> and in Buryatia sometimes khans did marry off their daughters to the winners of *naadan*-games, competitions in wrestling, archery, and horse racing.<sup>251</sup>

Finally, but very importantly, sports may have

- *magic, cultic, ritualistic, or religious functions.*

The relationship between sports and magic and cults is, however, most likely not of a mere functional but of a generic character. At any rate this relationship has been of significant concern and matter of debate among sport anthropologists. Therefore I will approach this relationship in detail in the following separate section.

To conclude this section, I shall make it clear once again that sports *may* fulfill all the listed functions, but may also not fulfill them. Most often they fulfill a certain number of these functions and combine them, but to highly varying degrees and with varying particular contents depending on what particular ‘players’ are involved, what their intentions are, and what resources they have at hand.

### ***Sports and (spi)rituality, magic, cult, and religion***

Early on anthropologists realized and widely agreed that games and sports have very much in common with cults and rituals.<sup>252</sup> This is not surprising, because the broadly accepted definition of ritual as “a category of behavior which is prescribed, predictable, stereotyped, communicative, and shared,”<sup>253</sup> applies to and holds true for games and sports as well, and in particular for sports competitions. Furthermore, countless historic and ethnographic reports about sports competitions, which were carried out as parts of manifold, but predominantly *magic*-religious, rituals, clearly indicated that there is a tight link between these two activities.

---

<sup>249</sup> Katrin Bromber, Birgit Krawietz and Petar Petrov, “Wrestling in Multifarious Modernity,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, 4 (2014): 396.

<sup>250</sup> Deshpande, *Physical Education in Ancient India*, 122.

<sup>251</sup> Stefan Krist, “Wrestling Magic: National Wrestling in Buryatia, Mongolia and Tuva in the Past and Today,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, 4 (2014): 427. See also below, p. 240.

<sup>252</sup> Harris and Park, “Introduction to the Sociocultural Study of Play, Games, and Sports,” 17.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

Most frequently sports competitions accompanied, or were themselves considered *to be*, rituals of *fertility magic*, attempting to influence the weather so that it rained enough, that livestock bred well, or that harvests were rich.<sup>254</sup> This was, for instance, reported of the Australian Aborigines, of most North American native tribes, and of the Tikopian Islanders of the South Pacific, to mention just three examples prominent in the literature.<sup>255</sup> Many more examples from all over the world could be listed, and not only past, but also numerous present ones.<sup>256</sup> As regards the particular sports carried out for these purposes, various kinds of wrestling bouts, variants of target shooting and target throwing (archery, dart throwing, ring and pin, etc.), tug-of-war, and ball games between two teams are most often practiced.<sup>257</sup>

Not much less frequently than for fertility magic, sport competitions were carried out as means for *counter magic against death* during burial ceremonies. This was especially common in large parts of Asia and Europe, including Siberia and Mongolia, and also ancient Greece, where, for instance, the famous Olympic Games had their roots in such funeral games. The main sports performed at such games were again most often wrestling bouts, but also foot, horse, and chariot races.<sup>258</sup>

Further occasions at which many people all over the world did and do frequently organize and engage in sport competitions, are rituals in connection with the *cycles of life*, both human and natural.<sup>259</sup> Regarding the former, many rites of passage are accompanied by tough physical

---

<sup>254</sup> Adolf E. Jensen, "Wettkampf-Parteien, Zweiklassen-Systeme und geographische Orientierung," *Studium Generale* 1, 1 (1947): 38; Damm, "Vom Wesen sog. Leibesübungen bei Naturvölkern," 3–5; Werner Körbs, "Kultische Wurzel und frühe Entwicklung des Sports," *Studium Generale* 13, 1 (1960): 14; Kamphausen, "Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern," 94.

<sup>255</sup> Stewart Culin, "Games," in *Handbook of American Indians: North of Mexico*, part 1, ed. Frederick Webb Hodge (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), 484–85; Raymond Firth, "A Dart Match in Tikopia: A Study in the Sociology of Primitive Sport," *Oceania* 1, 1 (1930): 67; Sands, "Anthropology Revisits Sport through Human Movement," 28.

<sup>256</sup> e.g. the Mongolian *Naadam*-Games (see Iwona Kabzińska-Stawarz, "Eriin Gurvan Naadam—'Three Games of the Men in Mongolia'," *Ethnologia Polona* 13 (1987): 54, and the—akin to them—games in Buryatia, which I have focused on in a number of my studies.

<sup>257</sup> Firth, "A Dart Match in Tikopia;" Damm, "Vom Wesen sog. Leibesübungen bei Naturvölkern," 3–4, 7; Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 64.

<sup>258</sup> Fritz Karl Mathys, *Kultische Ursprünge des Sports* (Celle: Pohl, 1958), 5–8; Körbs, "Kultische Wurzel und frühe Entwicklung des Sports," 11, 14.

<sup>259</sup> Jensen, "Wettkampf-Parteien, Zweiklassen-Systeme und geographische Orientierung," 38; Damm, "Vom Wesen sog. Leibesübungen bei Naturvölkern," 8; Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 76–77.



exercise, as in wrestling bouts.<sup>260</sup> Rites celebrating the change of seasons—preponderantly the end of winter and beginning of spring—are often accompanied by ball games, target shooting (or throwing), boxing and wrestling, and all kinds of races.<sup>261</sup>

The basic reason for this ancient and widespread interconnection between magic-religious cults and sportive competitions lies in the purpose and structure of cults and rituals. Cults, as German physical educator and sport scientist Werner Körbs outlines, are the *language* in which people talk with “the sublime,” and this language is “the offering of oneself, in gestures and postures, in play and competitions, that is by *corporeal* effort.”<sup>262</sup> It is “*corporeal* effort” or, as one can equally call it, *body language*, because, as Körbs puts it, this “seems to be most noticeable and impressive for both the pleading and the bestowing,”<sup>263</sup> that is for the people and for their gods. That “[p]hysical movement is integral to human ritual,” as Robert Sands has succinctly phrased, is indeed beyond doubt.<sup>264</sup> Hence, Sands correctly concludes that “as such, physical movement is integral to human spirituality and religion,” and therefore, “spirituality and, later, sport evolved from the dynamic interaction of ritual and movement patterns.”<sup>265</sup>

In and by means of these “movement patterns”—that is with *rituals* and *sports*—people did (and still do) visualize cosmic and divine events and make them to come alive, and by their own active and periodically repeated participation they make them more perceptible and tangible for themselves.<sup>266</sup> Thus, as they are of a common origin, both rituals and sports are forms of *play* humans have developed early on for the purpose of “remov[ing] enough of the fear of the unknown to make the sacred work for society,” as Frank Salamone has put it.<sup>267</sup> Therein, in making the sacred perceptible, tangible, and work for people and society, all other forms of expressive culture such as music, dance, fine arts, literature, and theater, are likewise rooted.<sup>268</sup> However, as man’s “first technical means” and his “first natural technical object” is his body, as

---

<sup>260</sup> Körbs, “Kultische Wurzel und frühe Entwicklung des Sports,” 14; Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 64.

<sup>261</sup> Culin, “Games,” 483; Damm, “Vom Wesen sog. Leibesübungen bei Naturvölkern,” 7; Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 77.

<sup>262</sup> Körbs, “Kultische Wurzel und frühe Entwicklung des Sports,” 13, translation and emphasis mine.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 14, translation and emphasis mine. Cf. also Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 69.

<sup>264</sup> Sands, “Anthropology Revisits Sport,” 27, emphasis mine.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Mathys, *Kultische Ursprünge des Sports*, 3, 14, 23.

<sup>267</sup> Salamone, “Religion as Play,” 166.

<sup>268</sup> Mathys, *Kultische Ursprünge des Sports*, 3.

we have learned from Marcel Mauss,<sup>269</sup> it was most likely physical “movement patterns,” that is *rituals* and *sports*, which were the first forms of expressive culture developed by people.

By pointing to another widely accepted constituent of the human condition, Donald Calhoun endorses Frank Salamone’s view when he in regard to people’s motivation to engage in rituals and sports writes: “To a person without modern scientific knowledge (and even to one with it) life and the world are mysterious and unpredictable.”<sup>270</sup> Rituals, including sports competitions, offer people both to indulge, at least for the duration of the ritual or competition, in a well known and predictable activity, providing a feeling of security, and, at the same time, to intervene in “divine struggles”<sup>271</sup> in order to influence them for one’s own benefit. Sports originally offered this opportunity to people, because, as Calhoun further outlines,

[p]reiterate peoples generally believe that by imitating or participating in the struggles of the gods they can influence the outcome and thereby themselves. So, at the festivals of spring, while the “good” gods were struggling to maintain fertility, the people would engage in contests—between villages, between subtribes, between women and men, between the married and the unmarried.<sup>272</sup>

The basic reasons why people do so, Calhoun describes, by taking the example of the northeast American Indians at the time of conquest, as follows:

The rituals were related to supernatural beings who were thanked or supplicated by feasts, dances, taboos, and ceremonies of purification. Associated with these rites were games—archery contests, pole climbing, foot races, wrestling, handball, football, lacrosse, dice games, guessing games, hide and seek, and tug-of-war. Each game was a contest symbolizing a struggle between elemental forces—good and bad weather, fertility and famine, illness and health, or life and death. The successful playing out of the athletic contest was supposed to win the favor of, or give help to, supernatural forces or beings in these very life-important natural struggles—for the falling of needed rain, the fertility of crops or game, the healing of an illness, or the freeing of a dead person’s spirit. Thus on

---

<sup>269</sup> See above, p. 15.

<sup>270</sup> Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 76.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 77.

the principle of like begets like, the successful playing of the game was believed to give a homeopathic reinforcement to the forces favorable to human beings.<sup>273</sup>

In other words, it was *sympathetic magic* in which these Indians did believe and engage and, as mentioned, many other people all over the world did too and still do so today. This was also recognized by Körbs who, despite his very crude evolutionist take on the matter, nonetheless contributed a valuable and useful categorization of such cultic games into two types in terms of their function. The first of these is precisely the one denoted above as *magic*, or as “Kampf *um* etwas,” as Körbs by drawing on Huizinga describes it, i.e. a ‘fight *for* something,’ thus aiming at having an *effect*. The second type constitutes cultic sports’ *symbolic* functions; that is their “Darstellung *von* etwas,” i.e. ‘enactment *of* something,’ which they often do, as these sports frequently mimic cosmic or mythic events, including ‘divine struggles.’<sup>274</sup> These two functions may also occur simultaneously, which in fact they often do, as, for instance, cosmic events like the course of the sun or that of the moon are frequently enacted in sports (in the form of races) in order to “help the sun keeping its course” or “to make the moon running,” thus to keep up the cosmic order favorable and necessary for people’s lives and wellbeing.<sup>275</sup>

As a consequence of all this, participating in such sport competitions, which symbolized the battle of the good forces against the evil, has been considered a sacred duty everywhere.<sup>276</sup> And this view remains widespread or has at least survived to a certain degree to the present day, even in Christian cultures, as, for example, the persisting customs of ‘Easter Ball’ games in Germany, Scandinavia, France, and England,<sup>277</sup> and ‘Pentecostal Wrestling’ in Oberwölz in the Austrian Alps<sup>278</sup> demonstrate. In eastern religions, physical exercise is in general considered a means for

---

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>274</sup> Körbs, “Kultische Wurzel und frühe Entwicklung des Sports,” 14. See also Damm, “Vom Wesen sog. Leibesübungen bei Naturvölkern,” 9.

<sup>275</sup> Körbs, “Kultische Wurzel und frühe Entwicklung des Sports,” 14, 17; Mathys, *Kultische Ursprünge des Sports*, 20. A more recent, concise discussion of James Frazer’s notion of *sympathetic magic* and an explanation of its various forms and applications, principally congruent with Körbs’s categories, provides Susan Greenwood in her book *The Anthropology of Magic*. James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 1 (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1935), 52–219; Susan Greenwood, *The Anthropology of Magic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 46–49.

<sup>276</sup> Mathys, *Kultische Ursprünge des Sports*, 22.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>278</sup> Bromber, Krawietz and Petrov, “Wrestling in Multifarious Modernity,” 403. Also I have visited and documented the event myself in 2007.

enhancing religious-spiritual experiences and for “entering the mysteries of the world,”<sup>279</sup> and thus is integral to these religions’ spiritual practices. In turn, believers are strongly encouraged to frequently engage in it.

All this has convinced the overwhelming majority of sport anthropologists that *in principle*, sports are of a *cultic* origin. Of course this cannot be said of *all* sports played today: First and foremost, because most of the only recently-introduced sports are without doubt mere secular inventions, but secondly because it is of course possible, as Kamphausen had argued, that competitions, at some point, may have been just added to cultic activities and feasts. Thus the cultic or religious purports of these sports may be just additional, whereas their kernel is of a mere sportive character.<sup>280</sup> German ethnologist Adolf Jensen aptly stated that, whereas every cultic activity has a playful dimension, not every form of play has a cultic one.<sup>281</sup>

Another anthropologist who contributed his share to this debate was the founding father of structural anthropology, Claude Levi-Strauss. He—not surprisingly—analyzed the *structures* of games and rituals and compared them. They seemed similar to him, as he revealed that in both of them, play elements are critical. Yet, more important for Levi-Strauss was the fundamental difference he saw between these two activities. In games, he stated, the participants start from an equal—“symmetrical,” as he puts it—position and become different in the sense that some lose and some win, thus the outcome is a status asymmetry. In rituals, he states, exactly the opposite happens, as, according to him, it is their function to overcome the status asymmetries of ordinary life and establish—for the duration of the ritual—symmetry.<sup>282</sup>

The observation and revelation of this distinction by the great French anthropologist is, of course, very useful, enlightening, and holds true for many cases, but not for all. First there are sports competitions—that is games—which are played out precisely for the purpose of achieving ‘symmetry’ between the players, as the aim is to achieve a tie. For this the examples of the Melanesian and Papua-New Guinean soccer games and of the North American natives’ lacrosse games were given above.<sup>283</sup> Secondly, and more importantly, the various and numerous sports competitions carried out for purposes of fertility or defensive magic show, that to analyze only

---

<sup>279</sup> Mathys, *Kultische Ursprünge des Sports*, 22, translation mine.

<sup>280</sup> Kamphausen, “Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern,” 69–70.

<sup>281</sup> Adolf Jensen in *Mythos und Kult bei Naturvölkern* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1951), referred to in David L. Miller, *Gods and Games: Toward a Theology of Play* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 21.

<sup>282</sup> Levi-Strauss. *The Savage Mind*, 32–33.

<sup>283</sup> See pp. 26 and 53–54.

their *structures* does not suffice to fully comprehend them. That is because whereas the *structures* of these competitions might show an ‘asymmetry’ between participants (because there are winners and losers at the end), their magic *function* (to secure fertility, to prevent illness, etc.) and their *symbolic* content (the struggle of the good forces against the evil) make clear that they are carried out for the benefit of *all* participants alike and for the society as a whole and thus aim to establish that ‘symmetry’ Levi-Strauss assigns as a distinctive feature to rituals. Hence, if applied not in the differentiating way he had supposed, Levi-Strauss’ categorization further corroborates the cultic function and origin of many sports.

Thus, for a correct and complete analysis of a sports competition one needs to consider its *structure* (its rules, its participants, its setting, etc.), its *functions*, and its *symbolic* contents, and, of course, the *historic* changes all of them have or may have undergone.

As regards the symbolic content, one has to consider such circumstances that, for instance, the fast movement of participants in a race may be understood as a means for their symbolic (and magic) purification,<sup>284</sup> or that the ball in a game may symbolize the sun (as in the Mayan ball games) or the head of Osiris (as in ancient Egypt) or the skull of a dead Viking (as in medieval England) or even Jesus Christ (as in the Easter Ball games),<sup>285</sup> or that the target for archery may symbolize the sun or the ‘female principle,’ whereas the arrow often symbolizes the ‘male principle.’<sup>286</sup> It is, however, very important to notice that the symbolic language of every game is *culture-specific*, that is, as Polish anthropologist Iwona Kabzińska-Stawarz has put it, “[a] game speaks in the symbols used in the *given* culture.”<sup>287</sup>

Many, if not the majority of sports of cultic origin underwent changes throughout the course of history. The most important development to notice is that, they lost their original purpose and became mere forms of entertainment, thus constituting *secularized survivals* of what once had been cultic or magic activities.<sup>288</sup> In some cases, for instance, tug-of-war, with its clear rendering

---

<sup>284</sup> Mathys, *Kultische Ursprünge des Sports*, 8, 13.

<sup>285</sup> Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 50, 78; Mathys, *Kultische Ursprünge des Sports*, 16.

<sup>286</sup> Mathys, *Kultische Ursprünge des Sports*, 15; James Mooney, “Amusements,” in *Handbook of American Indians: North of Mexico*, part 1, edited by Frederick Webb Hodge (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), 51.

<sup>287</sup> Iwona Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Game as a Communication. Symbolical-Magical Function of Games in Mongolia,” *Ethnologia Polona* 9 (1983): 137.

<sup>288</sup> Kamphausen, “Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern,” 75–76; Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Game as a Communication,” 135.

of the sex act, the original magic intent—in this case, of course, that of fertility magic<sup>289</sup>—is still obvious; however, in the majority of cases, it is not, or at least not at first sight. Nonetheless, many of the ‘modern’ sports are of such an origin—at least more than what today’s widely secularized world would think.

### *Sports as a mirror of society*

Although sports, as described above, frequently point to ancient cultural features *in* them, they also tell us a lot about socioeconomic conditions and cultural processes contemporaneous *with* them. I already referred to Kamphausen’s 1972 observation, that, because sports are tightly interconnected with most other cultural strains, these are mirrored in sports, wherefore the study of sports can contribute to a better comprehension of the general characteristics of the society in which they are practiced.<sup>290</sup> The German ethnologist was, however, by far not the first who recognized this potential of sports. Almost one-and-three-quarters centuries earlier, in 1801, English engraver, antiquary, and writer Joseph Strutt started out his famous book “*The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*” with the following statement:

In order to form a just estimation of the character of any particular people, it is absolutely necessary to investigate the Sports and Pastimes most generally prevalent among them. War, policy, and other contingent circumstances may effectually place men, at different times, in different points of view, but when we follow them into their retirements, where no disguise is necessary, we are most likely to see them in their true state, and may best judge of their natural dispositions.<sup>291</sup>

Sports and pastimes indeed often clearly point to the ‘natural dispositions’ of a culture or society or, more concretely, of people’s actual lives. For example, among the Motu of New Guinea, who mainly depend on fishing, and whose main means of transportation is outrigger canoes, “children can swim before they can walk” and “girls play *paro paro* [a swimming game], and the boys

---

<sup>289</sup> Damm, “Vom Wesen sog. Leibesübungen bei Naturvölkern,” 4; Lukas, *Die Körperkultur in frühen Epochen der Menschheitsentwicklung*, 41.

<sup>290</sup> Kamphausen, “Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern,” 73. See also above, p. 43.

<sup>291</sup> Joseph Strutt, *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, ed. J. Charles Cox (London: Methuen & Co, 1801), xv.

early in life build and race miniature outrigger canoes.”<sup>292</sup> Countless other such examples could be quoted. Two are the children of the nomadic Buryat and Mongolian stockbreeders and hunters, who reportedly can ride horses before they can walk and definitely play early in life with miniature bows and arrows.

Thus, many games and sports constitute an exhibit A of the old, but still highly applicable Marxist concept of *base and superstructure*. The former, which Marx had essentially defined as a society’s principal economic and sociopolitical traits, determines the latter, which is all forms of spiritual and expressive culture.<sup>293</sup> Although most often not referring to Marx, most sports anthropologists and sociologists nonetheless follow his concept. Closest to him came German sport sociologist Helmuth Plessner, who stated that, because sports are descended from the social order, one cannot change the former without first changing the latter.<sup>294</sup> Practically all of them agree that sports *reflect* the values and norms, generally prevalent in society. For example, American sports sociologist John Loy stated that in sports, the substantial elements of the culture and of the social structure—values, norms, knowledge, status roles, etc.—*combine*,<sup>295</sup> and MacClancy set forth that this makes them become “a major mode” of *expressing* social values.<sup>296</sup>

This, I believe, is true, because indeed many values, norms and rules (and status roles too) by which a society operates, appear in sports much more clearly and explicitly than in other social spheres and actions. They do so because of the specific character the social action of a sportive game or athletic competition constitutes: it is always *limited* in its range of time, space, number of acting persons and established rules. Games and competitions either last for a precisely settled duration, or have at least a determined beginning and ending; they are always held on a field or court (or track, or course, or suchlike), the shape and size (or length) of which have been set in advance; the number of players is either always the same or has been fixed before the beginning of each game. In addition, the number of rules as well as their complexity has to be limited too, otherwise their observance, which is an indispensable condition of every game, would not be guaranteed. Due to these significant limitations, sports display the values, norms, and rules by

---

<sup>292</sup> Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 72, explanatory addition mine.

<sup>293</sup> Outlined by Marx in his preface to his book “Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie [A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy],” first published in 1859 and republished in countless reprints and translations thereafter.

<sup>294</sup> Quoted in Lüschen, “Prolegomena zu einer Soziologie des Sports,” 509.

<sup>295</sup> Loy, “The Nature of Sport: A Definitional Effort,” 62.

<sup>296</sup> MacClancy, “Sport, Identity and Ethnicity,” 4.

which a society operates much more clearly than other, less limited social actions do, because these various limits make them appear in purer (i.e. unmixed, undisturbed and undistorted) forms. This is basically why sports—as Strutt, Kamphausen, and others have recognized—indeed provide, and constitute, excellent frames and opportunities for revealing and analyzing cultural traits and social behaviors.

Moreover, the latter's relatively 'pure' emergence in sports also renders *changes* ongoing in the society at large to often become apparent *earlier* in sports than in other social actions or spheres. Hence, sports are often not only “a leading *agent* of social change,” as Robert Sands has it, and as outlined above, but at the same time a “*barometer* of social change,”<sup>297</sup> and therefore usually very reliable *indicators* of such changes.<sup>298</sup>

In addition to the described limited character of the social action of a sports game or competition, there is one more reason why social changes become very well apparent in them: sports—like most other social actions—are, as already stated, “the creation of *people* interacting with one another.”<sup>299</sup> Therefore sports' sets or “embodiments”<sup>300</sup> of meanings are not “etched in stone,” but constantly newly “generated, and [...] open to negotiation and contest.”<sup>301</sup> But because of their public character and their often very great popularity, which imbue sports with all the functions and potentials described above, control of them frequently becomes highly contested.<sup>302</sup> Therefore *relations of power* become very apparent in sports, as one can usually easily identify “who attempts to control how a sport is to be organized and played, and by whom, [and] how it is to be represented, [and] how it is to be interpreted,”<sup>303</sup> and who succeeds in these attempts and who does not.

---

<sup>297</sup> Robert R. Sands, *Sport Ethnography* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2002), 7–8, emphases mine.

<sup>298</sup> Thomas Alkemeyer, “Die Aufführungen des Sports und die Strukturen der sozialen Welt: Ansätze zu einer vom Spiel ausgehenden Soziologie,” in *Sportsoziologie—Funktionen und Leistungen: Beiträge zur Jahrestagung der Sektion “Soziologie des Sports” in der DGS und der Sektion “Sportsoziologie” in der dvs, 28.–30. Juni 2001 in Erfurt*, ed. M. Klein (Erfurt: Universität Erfurt, 2001), 170.

<sup>299</sup> Coakley, *Sport in Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 26. See above, p. 58.

<sup>300</sup> MacClancy, “Sport, Identity and Ethnicity,” 7.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



In summary, it is safe to say that “the realm of sports as a societal subsystem provides revealing insight into larger processes.”<sup>304</sup> For instance, sports become secularized to much the same degree as a society as a whole becomes secularized,<sup>305</sup> and, as the post-Soviet developments in the traditional sports of the Buryats reveal, become re-(spi)ritualized at much the same pace as processes of reverting to religious beliefs regain momentum in the society in general. Altogether we can confidently follow Andrew Miracle in that “[s]ports provide a good medium for observing culture change,”<sup>306</sup> because, as he explains,

[e]ach society defines sports to reflect the features peculiar to that individual society. Changes in technology (the introduction of television), economics (increase or decrease in leisure time), politics (the effects of colonization), and social change (changes in racial and gender roles) may impact sports.<sup>307</sup>

Many examples show that such changes, and others too, have indeed impacted sports, and often quite significantly.

As a consequence, we can add to the above list of functions sports may fulfill, as a *meta-function*, their top-rate suitability for study in the human sciences, and in particular for social sciences, in that they lucidly mirror general social conditions and features as well as their changes. It is therefore no wonder that anthropologists (albeit—for the reasons described above—belatedly and to a lesser extent than one would think) have made use of this opportunity.

### ***Symbolic anthropology***

One of the best-known and highly influential examples of the utilization of sports (or sports-like activities) for a broad social analysis is Clifford Geertz’ famous article “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.” It was first published in 1972 in the journal *Daedalus*, but became much more widely known when it was republished one year later in a volume containing several of

---

<sup>304</sup> Katrin Bromber, Birgit Krawietz and Joseph Maguire, “Introduction: From Asian Sports to Sport in Asia,” in *Sport Across Asia: Politics, Cultures, and Identities*, ed. Katrin Bromber, Birgit Krawietz and Joseph Maguire (Routledge: New York, 2013), 9.

<sup>305</sup> Körbs, “Kultische Wurzel und frühe Entwicklung des Sports,” 20.

<sup>306</sup> Miracle, “Sports,” 1249.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 1250.

Geertz' essays entitled "*The Interpretation of Cultures*".<sup>308</sup> The title of this volume reveals Geertz' objective: he uses his (quite exciting and, in his article, quite amusingly presented) observation of illegal cockfighting as both a starting point and a reference base for his interpretation of the *whole* Balinese *culture*. As Elvio Angeloni, one of Geertz' American colleagues, has put it, the cockfights became for Geertz "a metaphor for just about everything else that happens in Bali."<sup>309</sup>

This quote points to the now widely adopted view that Geertz's "work was more part of the revolution in anthropology theory than a piece on the nature of sport in a cultural context."<sup>310</sup> Indeed, cockfights have the character of sports only partially, if at all, and probably not at all that of play. Furthermore many results of Geertz's analyses were later "almost completely rejected by many area specialists."<sup>311</sup> Thus, the value of his famous article lies indeed mainly in its demonstration of the "revolution in anthropology theory" and the new take on it, labeled as 'symbolic anthropology,' which Geertz had advocated. In this particular article, his credo that anthropology is "not an empirical science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning"<sup>312</sup> becomes very clear. On the other hand, he proves in this article—and regardless of whether one agrees or not with his particular conclusions—that the understanding of the meaning of *symbols*, especially that of "*shared, public* symbols," which the cockfights without doubt constitute for the Balinese, is crucial, i.e. of "central importance," for "the attainment of a broader understanding of culture" which is "the goal of cultural anthropologists."<sup>313</sup>

Geertz's utilization of the symbolic content of one such "shared, public" (and no matter whether illegal) activity as a mirror of the Balinese society's deeply embedded cultural traits became a prototype for many anthropological studies later on. It does not matter that the Balinese cockfighting does not have "any social end," that "it does not make anyone richer or change their status," that it does not "have any particular economic or political effect," that, "in fact, it is an autotelic activity."<sup>314</sup> To the contrary, this is, as already Huizinga and Caillois have noted, a

---

<sup>308</sup> See the entry for Geertz, Clifford, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in the bibliography.

<sup>309</sup> Elvio Angeloni, *Anthropology* (Dubuque: McGraw Hill, 2008), 165.

<sup>310</sup> Sands, *Sport Ethnography*, 5.

<sup>311</sup> Jonathan Spencer, "Symbolic Anthropology," in *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, ed. Jonathan Spencer and Alan Barnard (London: Routledge, 1996), 537.

<sup>312</sup> Angeloni, *Anthropology*, 165.

<sup>313</sup> All quotations stem from Harris and Park, "Introduction," 13.

<sup>314</sup> All quotations stem from Droulias, "Comprehensive Paper," 10.

typical, if not defining feature of any game, sport, or sport-like activity, and one particularly valuable and advantageous for social analysis, as Strutt has already pointed out. What matters is that, like most of these activities in most cultures, Balinese cockfights are “part of the *symbolic culture* of the Balinese.”<sup>315</sup> They “symbolize the struggle for status, dignity, self esteem, and respect,”<sup>316</sup> or, as Andreas Droulias has plainly put it: “Fighting cocks represent fighting men and their struggle to reach—and at the same time prove—perfection.”<sup>317</sup> Geertz himself put it that way: “Its function, if you want to call it that, is interpretive: it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves.”<sup>318</sup>

Studies on sports in other cultures have provided proof of this principal take of Geertz. Sport events frequently constitute a “*metasocial commentary*,” as MacAloon and Csikszentmihalyi have put it.<sup>319</sup> These “cultural performances,” as Harris and Park have called them,<sup>320</sup> fulfill the *meta-function* of mirroring general cultural traits and social conditions not only for (outside) social scientists, but also for the actors themselves. Their performances are ‘cultural’ in the sense that in them *culture* is performed, that is *played*. Thus Geertz also concurs with Huizinga. For both of them it is the *symbolic content* of games (or social activities in general) which reveals their ‘substance.’ It is a symbolic way, a “symbolic language,”<sup>321</sup> in which in these activities culture is performed (Geertz) or played (Huizinga), i.e., by all means, *mirrored*. The vast majority of sports anthropologists, up to the most recent studies, have followed this notion.

### ***Body cultures’ comeback***

One anthropologist who stressed this mirror function of sports and showed in detail that particular socioeconomic and political traits of a society may even determine which particular sports are practised and how they are performed, was German sports historian and anthropologist Henning Eichberg. Although Eichberg started publishing his insightful works in the early 1970s,

---

<sup>315</sup> Droulias, “Comprehensive Paper,” 10.

<sup>316</sup> Angeloni, *Anthropology*, 165.

<sup>317</sup> Droulias, “Comprehensive Paper,” 10.

<sup>318</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 448.

<sup>319</sup> MacAloon and Csikszentmihalyi, “Deep Play and the Flow Experience in Rock Climbing,” 377.

<sup>320</sup> Harris and Park, “Introduction,” 13.

<sup>321</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Game as a Communication,” 135.

his contributions were widely neglected for more than two decades, only gaining recognition in the 1990s.<sup>322</sup>

In his two early books, “*Der Weg des Sports in die industrielle Zivilisation (Sport on its Way into Industrial Civilization)*” and “*Leistung, Spannung, Geschwindigkeit: Sport und Tanz im gesellschaftlichen Wandel des 18./19. Jahrhunderts (Achievement, Tension, Speed: Sport and Dance in the Social Transformation of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century)*”, published in 1973 and 1978, respectively,<sup>323</sup> Eichberg maintained that “modern sports emerged along with modern industrial society,” and “that both are characterised by an emphasis on ‘achievement,’” which is why the “high level of rationalisation and quantification” is the “key defining feature of modern sports,” as Susan Brownell had summarized his statements and as I explained above using Ellis Cashmore’s only slightly-different phrasing.<sup>324</sup>

Eichberg’s main goal in outlining these “simultaneous features of the appearance of modern sports and of industrial society” was, however, “to show the *uniqueness* of modern [i.e. Western] sports.”<sup>325</sup> This first of Eichberg’s important contributions to historical and anthropological sports discourses was, at best, only partially understood by many, including, for instance, the influential British sport historians and sociologists Richard Mandell and Allen Guttmann. Although they were among the few who were drawing on Eichberg and, like him, recognized “that sports are culturally variable and that they change through time,”<sup>326</sup> they remained stuck in the Eurocentric belief that the particular developmental process of ‘modernization’ was *universal* and not, as in fact, only typical for the West and for Western sports. They were blind to both the

---

<sup>322</sup> There were three reasons for this. The first of these lies in Eichberg’s personal biography. For a short period of time, from 1968 to 1975, he was an active member of the ‘New Right,’ the (intellectual) radical nationalist movement in Germany at that time. Although he subsequently switched sides and became an activist of the relatively leftist ‘Greens,’ he was redlined by the German academia for more than two decades (and by some even today), which made references to his works practically impossible for any German scholar and even forced him to leave the country for Denmark, as no university or academic institution in Germany would dare to employ him. Second, until the mid-1990s, he published mostly in German, which led to an equally widespread neglect of his work in any non-German academic community, particularly the English speaking sphere, due to its aforementioned neglect of any non-English literature (see p. 39). Third, most who did read his works misunderstood or disagreed with him, because most of them still espoused “unilinear Eurocentric development schemes,” both in general and in the field of sports—schemes with which Eichberg had broken, and which he sharply criticized even in his initial publications. See Susan Brownell, “Thinking Dangerously: The Person and His Ideas,” in *Body Cultures: Essays on Sport, Space, and Identity by Henning Eichberg*, ed. John Bale and Chris Philo (London: Routledge, 1998), 24–27.

<sup>323</sup> See bibliography.

<sup>324</sup> See p. 47.

<sup>325</sup> Brownell, “Thinking Dangerously,” 31, emphasis and addition mine.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

huge diversity of non-Western sports, which did and do not show these features of rationalization, quantification and the primacy of ‘achievement,’ and also to the numerous examples of sports or sport-like activities *within* the Western ‘civilization’ which also do not. Eichberg instead stressed the cultural *relativity* of sports and the resulting vast diversity of sports or sport-like activities—in his terms, the multifarious *movement cultures* or, more generally, *body cultures*, which existed and exist all over the world.

One instance Eichberg adduced for showing that sports may significantly differ from its dominant form in the Western industrial world was that of the soccer games of the Gahuku-Gama of Papua New Guinea, which intentionally always ended with a tie, as I have already cited above.<sup>327</sup> Further examples he quotes include, among others, the Native North American Pueblo people, who have developed an urban culture, and thus sports, which, in their case, are foot races, but which are carried out in a *non-competitive* way, and Indonesian soccer, which is characterized by endless elaborated combination play: that is, the players try to pass the ball around among the members of their team as often as possible rather than to score a goal.<sup>328</sup> In Libya, where Eichberg carried out ethnographic fieldwork himself (as he also did in Indonesia), he found that both Western sports and traditional Bedouin games coexisted there, despite their quite contradictory features.<sup>329</sup>

This last example highlights another important ‘revelation’ Eichberg made: in the realm of sports, contradictions, tensions, and conflicts appear at least as frequently as harmony and consensus among the involved actors. Surprisingly, these were also mostly overlooked by Mandell, Guttmann and many others, even when apparent in the sports of Western societies on which they had focused. For instance, modern achievement sports in Western countries did not completely erase traditional folk sports. As proof, Eichberg cites Breton wrestling, the Scottish Highland Games, Danish workers’ sports, and other examples. The aforementioned Easter Ball games in Germany and other countries, and Pentecostal Wrestling in Austria, could also be added to this list.

---

<sup>327</sup> See p. 53.

<sup>328</sup> Eichberg, *Leistung, Spannung, Geschwindigkeit*, 17–18 and 21–22.

<sup>329</sup> Henning Eichberg and Ali Yehia El Mansouri, “Sport in Lybia: Physical Culture as an Indicator of Social Contradictions,” in *Body Cultures: Essays on Sport, Space, and Identity* by Henning Eichberg, ed. John Bale and Chris Philo (London: Routledge, 1998). Originally published in *Geschichte der Leibesübungen*, ed. Horst Ueberhorst (Berlin: Bartels & Wernitz, 1989).

Furthermore, in the late nineteenth century, in various countries parallel to internationally standardized (Olympic) sports, specific, i.e. *diverse*, sport (or *body*) cultures, which were linked to concepts or ideologies of national identity, emerged. The German *Turnen* and the Czech *Sokol* movement, which Eichberg among others quotes, were prominent cases, but so was for instance, the Jewish *Hakoah* movement. Thus Eichberg, in 1991, concluded as follows:

Over a period of 200 years we arguably see a general picture of rising nationalism tied into growing national sporting differentiation. Hence, industrial modernity is not only characterised by a universal standardisation and homogenisation of sport and body culture, corresponding to the homogenizing effects of the industrial system, but at the same time it does support a counteracting, subversive tendency towards multiplicity and heterogeneity—one that breaks through especially in social-historical situations of change and unrest, such as surfaced in the early nineteenth century and then again in the years between 1900 and the 1920s.<sup>330</sup>

In 1989 and the following years, without a doubt, such a situation “surfaced” again in (Eastern) Europe and the (former) Soviet Union. Already in his article from 1991, from which the above quotation stems, Eichberg makes brief mention of what, in regard to sports, “breaks through” in the successor states of the Soviet Union. Also there, he stated, “the consciousness about one’s own national body culture has never disappeared, and will revive along with the wider emancipation process.”<sup>331</sup> He was to be proved right, and several of these processes and their repercussions on sports he described and analyzed himself in a number of his later articles.<sup>332</sup>

In a great number of his works Eichberg reveals what features many, if not most, of these ‘traditional,’ ‘folkloristic,’ ‘non-achievement’ sports, have in common and what also, since about the 1960s, but increasingly in the last two decades, reenters the realm of professional achievement sports as well. This is their embeddedness in *feasts*, their *playful* character, their

---

<sup>330</sup> Henning Eichberg, “A Revolution of Body Culture? Traditional Games on the Way from Modernization to ‘Postmodernity’,” in *Body Cultures: Essays on Sport, Space, and Identity* by Henning Eichberg, ed. John Bale and Chris Philo (London: Routledge, 1998), 131.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>332</sup> E.g. in “Alte Spiele—Neue Feste,” in *Neue Sportkultur. Von der Alternativen Bewegungskultur zur Neuen Sportkultur. Neue Wege in Sport, Spiel, Tanz und Theater—ein Handbuch* (Lichtenau: AOL-Verlag, 1995) and in “Olympische und andere Bewegungskulturen—Über Exklusion, Anerkennung und Fest,” in *Sport bewegt Europa. Beiträge zur interkulturellen Verständigung* (Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Hohengehren, 2006). See bibliography.

belonging to a *culture of laughter*, and their openness for the ‘*other*’—both the other *body* (not slim, not strong, not young, not male, not healthy, etc.) as well as the other *culture* (of protest, of subversion, of ridicule, etc.). Music and dance were and are integral parts of all kinds of ‘folk sports’ events, and they became that again also in professional sports in recent years, as TV coverage and an increasing demand for entertainment has turned them into shows and spectacles. Also new alternative sport and body cultures have appeared. Today, also in the West, sports are played less and less in (hierarchically organized) sport clubs, but more and more without any formal institutionalization. For the large majority of sporting people fun, laughter, irony, and self-irony has always been more important than victory, and this has remained and will probably continue in the future. For traditional ‘folk sports’—which were and are usually organized at feasts—this holds true too. In them it is not achievement that has priority, nor victory that is celebrated, nor the perfect body, but rather the grotesque:

In a feast therefore the grotesque body is celebrated. It can, indeed, it should be laughed at. In tug-of-war, just in the moment of victory, the stronger combatants bump on their butts. The crowd yelps. It is no wonder that this event was removed from the program of the Olympics. It disturbs the seriousness of the pretentious professionalism.<sup>333</sup>

Tug-of-war was removed from the Olympics after the games of 1920 and has never been reintroduced. In recent times, however, other, new, sports which soften the “seriousness of professionalism,” such as freestyle skiing and beach volleyball, have become part of the Olympics. And indeed reintroduced was curling, which had been removed even earlier than tug-of-war, but became an Olympic sport again in 1998. This shows that also in the sphere of professional sports, and even in its Holy Grail—the Olympics—features of the ‘culture of laughter’ have regained ground. People’s movement and body cultures have always been many, diverse, and, for a large part, funny. Now even the sphere of professional sports has, at least partially, regained this quality. Thus it has become clear that the ‘puristic’ form, in which only the (industrial-like) production of victories counts, is—or perhaps already *was*—only *one* of many sports or body cultures, even in countries characterized by the modernization process triggered and shaped by industrialization and, in any case, in the huge rest of the world. “Play

---

<sup>333</sup> Eichberg, “Alte Spiele—Neue Feste,” 179, translation mine.

and sport,” Eichberg concludes, “are to be understood as a cultural plural.”<sup>334</sup> Hence, there is no ‘history of sport;’ there are histories of sports. And also the ‘modernity’ of sports, as Katrin Bromber, Birgit Krawietz, and Petar Petrov have stated, is a “*multifarious* modernity.”<sup>335</sup> Consequently there is also no ‘anthropology of sport,’ but only one of sports.

I have used the notion of *body culture* right from the beginning of this thesis, as it has become a widely known and understood term. It was, however, only Henning Eichberg who actually coined and introduced the notion, originally in its German form of “Körperkultur”. He developed it—together with his own observations—out of Norbert Elias’ analysis of the history of table manners,<sup>336</sup> but its meaning also follows from Marcel Mauss’ concept of ‘body techniques’ and from Bourdieu’s well known notion of ‘habitus.’ Susan Brownell once again best summarized these four scholars’ respective conceptions, stating that “[t]his perspective looks at the body primarily as cultural, which is to say, as socially constructed and historically variable.”<sup>337</sup> Her definition of body culture reads as follows:

I define body culture as the entire repertoire of things that people do to and with their bodies, and the elements of culture that shape their doing. Body culture can include daily practices of health, hygiene, fitness, beauty, dress and decoration; postures, gestures, manners, ways of speaking and eating; ritual, dance, sports and other kinds of bodily performance. It includes the methods for training these practices into the body, the way the body is publicly displayed and the meanings that are expressed in that display. Body culture is embodied culture.<sup>338</sup>

This embodiment happens, as Mauss has laid it out and I have described above, through education; thus, as needs to be added, through a year-long process, because, as Mauss rightly states, “a manual knack can only be learned slowly.”<sup>339</sup> The somewhat tragicomic, but very lucid, example, he recalls for this from his experiences during World War One, explains this very well:

---

<sup>334</sup> Eichberg, “Olympische und andere Bewegungskulturen,” 105, translation mine.

<sup>335</sup> Bromber, Krawietz and Petrov, “Wrestling in Multifarious Modernity,” 391, emphasis mine.

<sup>336</sup> Eichberg, *Leistung, Spannung, Geschwindigkeit*, 9.

<sup>337</sup> Brownell, “Thinking Dangerously,” 41.

<sup>338</sup> Brownell, “Why Should an Anthropologist Study Sports in China?” 51.

<sup>339</sup> Mauss, “Techniques of the Body,” 460.



The English troops I was with did not know how to use French spades, which forced us to change eight thousand spades per division when we relieved a French division, and vice versa.<sup>340</sup>

This demonstrates that what is *embodied* by members of one culture (or subculture) is indeed very difficult for others to even learn halfway, not to speak of perfecting, that is, to embody it. Therefore body cultures are not only very different from one another, but also switching them is extremely difficult for individuals in their lifetime, hence they are without a doubt very significant cultural features and distinction markers. They may change, as historic studies reveal, but they do so very slowly.

What also needs to be stressed, albeit it is quite self-evident, is that also ideologically induced traits of a culture influence and shape the respective body culture in decisive ways. Mauss cites for this the “pious Muslim,” who

can easily be recognized: even when he has a knife and fork (which is rare), he will go to any lengths to avoid using anything but his right hand. He must never touch his food with his left hand, or certain parts of his body with his right.<sup>341</sup>

Another example is the Mongols’ belief that the soul of a person is both in their childhood and in their old age not yet, or not anymore, strongly fixed to the body, which explains, and at the same time, allows members of these two age groups to perform ‘wild’ behavior, such as jumping and running or, in the case of the elderly, drunkenness—behaviors which are highly inappropriate for (younger) adults.<sup>342</sup> Thus, to quote once more Marcel Mauss,

[t]o know why he [i.e. the “pious Muslim” (or the Mongol or anybody else, as we may add)] does not make a certain gesture and does make a certain other gesture, neither the physiology nor the psychology of motor asymmetry in man is enough; it is also necessary to know the *traditions* that impose it.<sup>343</sup>

---

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 465.

<sup>342</sup> See Gaelle Lacaze, “Representations and Techniques of the Body among the Mongols,” *Inner Asia* 5, 1 (2003): 58–60.

<sup>343</sup> Mauss, “Techniques of the Body,” 465, additions and emphasis mine.

It is due to Eichberg that again—more than half a century after Mauss—sports were also both re-linked with and re-included into this concept of body culture, so highly valuable for sports anthropologists. Before Eichberg advocated their return into it, sports were, due to “the fragmenting effects of professionalized sports,” also singled out as “a separate, peripheral topic of study.”<sup>344</sup> In his works Eichberg consistently showed that sporting techniques—and not only that of professional sports—are closely linked with other activities directly related to the body, such as manners, gestures, sexuality, and many others, and thus put an end to the belief in the isolation of sports, but placed them again in the wide social context of bodily expressions and movements, that is, *body cultures*.

As a last step Eichberg proposed a concept of how body cultures might be linked to—or be seen as being interdependent with—different forms of *national identities*. Both so far prevalent theories of how national identities emerge—the essentialist one that holds that a nation is “a sort of substance from archaic roots” and the constructivist one that holds that national identities are a “mere construction of ideological character,” i.e. only imagined—do not, for Eichberg, satisfyingly describe and explain the matter. “The nation,” he instead asserts, “is *practiced*.”<sup>345</sup> By this he essentially means the same as Magdalinski and Chandler have revealed for how any identity is sustained: it must be “*rehearse[d]* and *performe[d]*,” that is, it must be constantly “reinforced through education and repetitive, and ritualistic, cultural *practice*.”<sup>346</sup> Eichberg, however, goes one step further, as he sets forth that national identities can be even *created* in such practice. This may be rallies and demonstrations, but also festivities, cultural events, and sports events. What they have in common is not only that people experience strong feelings of togetherness—of the ‘we’ they are—thus are emotionally moved, but that they are also physically in motion, thus move and display (and may even put at risk) their *body*.

These events, and people’s movements, may, however, differ considerably in regard to how they express their (new) identity, their new ‘we.’ Eichberg identifies in regard to national identities three principal models:

---

<sup>344</sup> Brownell, “Why Should an Anthropologist Study Sports in China?” 51.

<sup>345</sup> Henning Eichberg, “The Nation in Movement—Turning the Theory of the People down on the Feet,” keynote for the International Conference on Social Science in Sport, 8<sup>th</sup> ISHPES Seminar, 24–27 August 2006, in Ljubljana, Slovenia: “Sport, Nation, Nationalism” ([www.isdy.net/pdf/eng/2006\\_14.pdf](http://www.isdy.net/pdf/eng/2006_14.pdf), accessed May 8, 2014), 1, 9.

<sup>346</sup> See above, p. 59. Emphases mine.

- (1) the *identity of production*, which is to be understood as the *hierarchic* model of identity, or rather *identities*, as in this model the nation is “understood as an economic unit, competing with other nations on the market;”<sup>347</sup>
- (2) the *identity of integration*, which is characterized by the primacy of discipline and education, in order to create ‘equality,’ or rather, conformity;
- (3) the *popular identity*, which emerges from an emancipated civil society by means of self organization.

As regards sports and body cultures, the result and ranking orientated achievement sports are correlated with the first model. Gymnastics, calisthenics, marches, and suchlike are correlated with the second model, and popular games, festivities, carnival, and laughter with the third model.

It is obvious that these three models of identity and the correlated respective body cultures contradict each other. Nonetheless, all three of them do exist in every society or ‘nation’ simultaneously, but in differing strengths. Eichberg’s concept constitutes an appropriate tool for analyzing “trialectically,” as he puts it,<sup>348</sup> all these social meanings which sports bear, and the roles their actors play in society. Particularly applicable is this tool for cases which are characterized by struggles between different social, political and economic ideologies, or, more precisely, between their institutions, agents and activists. Thus, in a world in which cultural hegemonies, as mentioned above, are more and more contested, and, as such processes become especially apparent and often ‘played out’ first in sports, this tool is definitely highly suitable. Buryat traditional sports, the control of which is contested between three different social and economic institutions, “[...], the Buddhist religion, the State and players in the new market economy,” as I have described in an earlier study,<sup>349</sup> is only one case, which can be better understood by applying this recently developed tool for a socio-anthropological analysis of sports. Many more similar cases can be found in the present world; nay, they, as it seems, even constitute the majority of them.

To conclude, one can state that today sports anthropology is finally keeping up with current developments, as suitable theoretical frames and analytical tools for that purpose have been developed. Perhaps the best recent example is French anthropologist Roberte N. Hamayon’s

---

<sup>347</sup> Eichberg, “The Nation in Movement,” 6.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>349</sup> Krist, “Where Going back is a Step Forward,” 111.

book “*Jouer*”, published in 2012, in which she brilliantly and comprehensively outlines the present state of art of the anthropology of play with numerous references to games and sports.<sup>350</sup>

---

<sup>350</sup> Roberte N. Hamayon. *Jouer. Étude anthropologique à partir d'exemples sibériens*. Paris: La Découverte, 2012.



## Chapter 2:

### Between East and West: History of the Buryats

After first giving a brief geographical overview of the Baikal region, this chapter will outline the history of the Buryats with a particular focus on the main characteristics of their traditional culture and on how and why they have changed over time. This will provide the reader with the necessary background knowledge for understanding the subsequent chapters, which will deal with the three traditional Buryat sports, wrestling, archery, and horse racing, and the Buryats' traditional sport festivals.

#### Geographical overview of the Baikal region

##### *Natural Environment*<sup>351</sup>

The area in which the majority of the Buryats reside is located in Southern Siberia, to the west, south, and east of Lake Baikal. It stretches eastward from the vicinity of Nizhneudinsk, a Russian town in the Irkutsk Province of the Russian Federation, to the steppes around the town of Borzja, which is in the Federation's Trans-Baikal Territory,<sup>352</sup> and from the northern end of

---

<sup>351</sup> The data and information presented in this chapter rest mainly upon Mariya O. Erdyneyeva and Boris A. Chernov, *Geografiya Buryatii* (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1994), 11–62.

<sup>352</sup> At the present time the Russian Federation consists of 85 large administrative sections: the so-called 'subjects' (Russian: субъекты, *subyekty*) of the federation. These 'subjects,' however, differ in regard to the extent of their self-government and the degree of their autonomy, which is expressed by the different titles they bear. The most numerous type is called *oblast'* (область), which literally translates as "region," but when describing these large administrative sections, the English term "province" seems to me to be a more appropriate translation for it. The Russian term *kray* (край), which some of the 'subjects' of the Russian Federation bear as their title, actually translates as "brink" or "edge," but figuratively also means "land" or "country." However, in this particular application as an actual administrative subunit of a country, "territory" is probably the more apt and unambiguous English translation for it. The third type of 'subjects' is the one with the highest degree of autonomy, *respublika* (республика), i. e. "republic" in English. Thus, regarding this term's translation, it is clear of difficulties. All these 'subjects,' irrespective of their particular type, are subdivided into further, smaller administrative units, called

Lake Baikal south to the border of Russia with Mongolia. Geodetically speaking, this area stretches from 98 to 117 degrees in longitude and from 50 to 56 degrees in latitude; that is nearly 1000 miles from the west to the east and 500 miles from the north to the south.

Located thousands of miles away from any sea coast, the climatic conditions of this area are extremely continental. Long and very cold winters with nighttime temperatures dropping to negative 55 degrees Fahrenheit contrast with short but hot summers with days in July of over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. These conditions are accompanied by very low precipitation both in summer and winter, not exceeding an annual total of 10 inches.

Contrasting this quite dry climate, some of Siberia's largest rivers—e.g. Lena, Angara, Selenga, Shilka, Onon, to name just the biggest ones—flow through the area. Also it is rich in lakes, of which gigantic Lake Baikal is, of course, the most prominent. Both these rivers and lakes are rich in fish.

As landscape shapes are concerned, the whole area is a transition zone between the Inner Asian steppes and the Siberian *taiga*, the coniferous boreal forest, and thus quite varied in terms of scenery. High mountains, with peaks up to 10,000 feet high, contrast with gentle rolling lands and thick forests with treeless plain grasslands. Therefore, four general landscape types alternate throughout the region: steppe, forest-steppe, taiga, and mountain tundra. The steppes are dry grasslands, usually barren, and sometimes with salty soil. Despite their sometimes semi-desert-like appearance, they provide excellent conditions for nomadic livestock breeding. The characteristic appearance of the forest-steppes is an alternation of small, solitary woods with dry grassland, and appearing most often on the southern slopes—that is, on the sunny side—of the hills and mountains. The taiga is a pure coniferous forest. It is home to many animals valued for

---

*rayony* (районы), which are widely and, in fact, really quite unanimously translated into English as “districts.” Thus, I follow this widespread translation too. In some cases a number of neighboring *rayony* make up an *okrug* (округ), which literally translates as “circle.” But in Russian, the term also denominates a middle-sized ‘national’ administrative unit, in the sense that representatives of a particular nation make up a large part—however, not necessarily the majority—of its population. As a clear translation into English of the term *okrug* with regards to an administrative unit, and also for distinguishing it terminologically from the other administrative units, I think, the English term “region” suits best. Thus, to summarize, the various administrative sections and units of the Russian Federation are translated in this study as follows:

<i>respublika</i> (республика)	– “republic”
<i>oblast’</i> (область)	– “province”
<i>kray</i> (край)	– “territory”
<i>okrug</i> (округ)	– “region”
<i>rayon</i> (район)	– “district”

their fur—sables, ermines, foxes, and others. It is also densely populated with wolves, bears, deer, wild boars, and many birds. Hence, hunting has also always been one of the main occupations of the people living in the area. The treeless scenery of the mountain tundra, with moss, lichen, shrub, or just scree or boulders covering the ground, predominates high in the mountains. But also some alpine pastures can occasionally be found.

The most striking natural phenomenon in the region is Lake Baikal. With a surface area of 13,550 square miles, the lake is the seventh largest on earth in expanse. It is the world's deepest lake, with an average depth of 2,100 feet and a maximum depth of 5,370 feet. It is therefore also the world's most water-rich lake, containing 6,500 cubic miles of freshwater, which represent twenty percent of all freshwater on earth. Due to a unique natural self-cleaning system, caused by endemic micro-flora and -fauna, this water, for the most part, has the best drinking quality. Most of the fish and even some of the mammals in the lake are endemic as well, i.e. species to be found only in that particular lake and nowhere else in the world. Of these, the Baikal seals are the most famous, because they are one of the world's very few freshwater seals, and are by far the species furthest removed from an ocean. On account of all this, it probably does not come as a surprise that people throughout time have been treating the lake with deepest respect. For the Buryats, it is a holy lake.

### ***Population***

In 2002, the total population of the three large Southern Siberian administrative sections of the Russian Federation, through which the Buryats' hereditary land stretches—the Irkutsk Province, the Republic of Buryatia, and the Trans-Baikal Territory—amounts 4,718,289.<sup>353</sup> With an area of 598,960 square miles, the overall population density is as low as 7.87 persons per square mile. There is, however, a big difference in regard to the population density between the huge northern taiga forest, and the smaller southern steppes. The population in the southern regions, in which both nomadic stock breeding and agriculture are possible, is much higher than that of the north. In the late nineteenth century, the region's main transport axis—the Trans-Siberian Railroad—

---

<sup>353</sup> The demographic data given in this chapter stem from the population census conducted in the Russian Federation in 2002 ([http://www.perepis2002.ru/ct/html/TOM\\_14\\_25.htm](http://www.perepis2002.ru/ct/html/TOM_14_25.htm), accessed April 7, 2015) and from population statistics provided by the administrations of the mentioned districts and national regions (see footnote 352).



was also built in the south. Thus, practically all industrial and urban development of the region took place in its southern parts, and today the population density there is about 75 people per square mile.

Concerning the ethnic makeup of the population, today it is overwhelmingly Russian, with a population of 4,023,507, compared to 423,932 for the Buryats. In the Irkutsk Province and in the Trans-Baikal Territory, the Buryat populations constitute only tiny minorities (3.1 percent and 6.1 percent of the total populations respectively) and even in the Republic of Buryatia itself, where they number 272,910, they make up only 27.8 percent of the total population. Thus, the Buryats have become a minority in their own land.

One has to say, though, that on the local level, there are still some areas and districts where their share of the population is significantly higher, and in some cases they even make up the majority, for example, in the Ol'khon district of the Irkutsk province, or in the Aginsk Buryat region of the Trans-Baikal territory and in several districts of the Republic of Buryatia. The Buryats are also not the sole indigenous population group of the region. There are also Evenk communities, for the most part scattered in the forested north of the region, and the Soyots, who reside in the Buryat Republic's southwestern mountainous Oka district. Both these groups, however, are very small in number. Only 2,334 Evenks live in the Republic of Buryatia, constituting just 0.24 percent of the republic's total population. The figures for the Evenks in the Irkutsk province and in the Trans-Baikal territory are even smaller. Concerning the Soyots, they number 2,739, that is, 0.28 percent of the total population of the Republic of Buryatia.

In addition to these three indigenous population groups and the Russians, a number of other national minorities can be found in the region, including Ukrainians, Tartars, Belarusians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Chuvash people, Germans, Mordvins, Jews, Poles, Koreans, and others. Immigration of most of these groups took place during the Soviet period, except for the Jews and Poles, whose immigration into the region dates back to Tsarist times.

The latter is equally true in regard to the *Old Believers*, a noteworthy subgroup of the Russians.<sup>354</sup> They constitute a secession group of the Russian Orthodox Church, which oppose

---

<sup>354</sup> The information about the Old Believers given in this paragraph rests on James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian colony 1581–1990* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 44; Gisela Reller, *Zwischen Weißem Meer und Baikalsee. Bei den Burjaten, Adygen und Kareliern* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1981), 66–67; Natalya L. Zhukovskaya, "Religion and Ethnicity in Eastern Russia, Republic of Buryatia: A Panorama of the

church reforms of the mid-seventeenth century. For this they were brutally persecuted and discriminated against, and thus fled to the most remote areas or left Russia altogether. In 1764, Tsarina Catherine the Great decreed the relocation of the Old Believers to Siberia, who by then had settled in Poland. A large portion of them found a new home in the Trans-Baikal region, in areas belonging for the most part to today's Republic of Buryatia. The local people there called them *semeyskyye*, an adjective made up from *semya*, the Russian word for "family", because, in contrast to any of the others, who were exiled to Siberia, they arrived not as single individuals, but in family groups. They founded their own villages, in which they have been living ever since and, for the most part, in strict accordance to their conservative and rather puritanical rules. Unfortunately, recent censuses do not represent the Old Believers as a distinct religious group and thus provide no numerical data about them. In 1861, about 18,000 Old Believers were counted in the Trans-Baikal province<sup>355</sup> and for 1930, a figure of 22,640 is given for them.<sup>356</sup>

Buryat population groups can also be found beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. In both neighboring countries, Mongolia and China, Buryat minorities have been living since Tsarist times. Reliable information about their numerical sizes, however, is unfortunately not available, though for the Buryats in Mongolia several authors indicate the same figure of 35,000.<sup>357</sup> For those in China, however, indications vary between 4,500<sup>358</sup> and 10,000<sup>359</sup>.

### *Economy*<sup>360</sup>

The steppes in the Baikal region, despite the harsh climatic conditions, are ideally suited for nomadic stock breeding, but tillage farming is also possible. The former was the Buryats' main

---

1990s," *Central Asian Survey* 14, 1 (1995): 26, 34; and Natal'ya N. Stakheyeva, *Staroobryadchestvo Vostochnoy Sibiri v XVII – nachale XX vv.*, avtoreferat dissertatsii. Irkutsk 1998.

<sup>355</sup> Stakheyeva, *Staroobryadchestvo Vostochnoy Sibiri*, 15.

<sup>356</sup> Zhukovskaya, "Religion and Ethnicity," 34.

<sup>357</sup> See e.g. Tilman Musch, *Nomadismus und Sesshaftigkeit bei den Burjaten: Gesellschaftlicher Wandel im Spiegel zeitgenössischer Folklore* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2006), 11; and Alan J. K. Sanders, *Historical Dictionary of Mongolia* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 30.

<sup>358</sup> Marie-Lise Beffa and Roberte Hamayon, "Les langues mongoles," *Etudes mongoles et sibériennes* 14 (1983): 129.

<sup>359</sup> Erdyneyeva and Chernov, *Geografiya Buryatii*, 70.

<sup>360</sup> The information given in this chapter rests on Badma Sh. Dorzhiyev, *Buryatiya epokhi novogo vremeni* (Ulan-Ude 2011); Reller, *Zwischen Weißem Meer und Baikalsee*; and Natal'ya L. Zhukovskaya, ed., *Istoriko-kul'turnyy atlas Buryatii* (Moskva: Dizayn.Informatsiya. Kartografiya, 2001).

field of economic activity, the latter that of the Russian settlers. In addition, the richness of the natural environment allows for hunting and fishing as further economic activities, which therefore have always played an important role as well. Furthermore, the huge forests in the area provide enormous resources of timber.

The region is also blessed with regard to mineral resources. Already in Tsarist times the silver and gold mines in the region were of more than regional economic importance. In Soviet times, oil deposits were discovered north of Irkutsk; thus, oil production began. More recently discovered deposits of various non-ferrous metals contribute to the continuation of the mining activities as a major economic factor in the region.

Since the late nineteenth century, the Trans-Siberian Railroad has provided an excellent means of transportation for all these natural resources as well as for commodities and—perhaps most importantly—for people too. Therefore, the industrial and urban development of the region was already set in Tsarist days and kept going with only a few setbacks ever since. This, as we will see, also played a decisive role in the changes which Buryat society and culture underwent.

## **History of the Baikal region and the Buryats**

### ***Prehistory (ca. 300,000 – 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE)***<sup>361</sup>

The first traces of human settlement in the Baikal region—various stone tools found in the Trans-Baikal region—date back to the Middle Paleolithic Period as being an estimated 200–300 thousand years old. Worldwide interest among archaeologists aroused the discovery of two upper Paleolithic settlements in the Cis-Baikal region, Mal'ta and Bureti, dated 23,000–13,000 BCE.

Up to the Neolithic (ca. 4,500 – 2,000 BCE) people survived by hunting and gathering. Then, the 'Neolithic revolution' took place in the Baikal region as well. During the Bronze Age (ca.

---

<sup>361</sup> This short outline rests on Vladimir B. Bakhayev and Irina N. Shagdurova, *Istoriya Buryatii*, part 1 (Ulan-Ude: Belig, 1995), 4–11; Aleksandr D. Tsybiktarov, “Buryatiya v epokhu kamnya, bronzy i rannego zheleza,” in *Istoriya Buryatii s drevneyshikh vremen do nachala XX veka*, edited by Yefrem Ye. Tarmakhanov (Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009), 5–45; and Anatoliy D. Zhalsarayev, *Vremya. Sobytiya. Lyudi* (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2011), 4–7.

2,000 – 800 BCE),<sup>362</sup> however, the climate changed and became those of an extreme continental climate, which is characteristic for the region still today. People adapted to these conditions by changing their way of life and mode of production again. For the majority, they abandoned sedentary agricultural life and became nomadic stock breeders. It was this change which most significantly determined the later history of the region.

During the Bronze Age, two cultures emerged in the region. One is characterized by its slab graves, the other, slightly younger, one by its characteristic ‘deer stones,’ head-high stone steles with stylized images of antlered deer. Over time, however, these two cultures and their bearers seem to have intermixed and probably dominated the region more together than parallel, up to the third century BCE.

### *Steppe empires (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE – 14<sup>th</sup> century CE)*<sup>363</sup>

For more than one and a half millennia, from the third century BCE up to the fourteenth century CE a number of vast empires—following one after the other in time—molded the political, social, and cultural life of the peoples in the Eurasian steppe belt. Though located on the northern fringe of that area, the Baikal region most often constituted an integral component of these powerful empires. Therefore the ethno-social and cultural processes which proceeded in these empires had a crucial impact on the region and on the historical processes that led to the emergence of the ethnic group that we recognize today as Buryat.

A characteristic feature of these empires was that they all were heterogeneous in regard to their ethnic and linguistic make-ups. The first was founded in 209 BCE by the *Hiung-Nu*, the

---

<sup>362</sup> Despite increasing, and justified, criticism from archaeologists and others of the Three-Age System (Stone Age – Bronze Age – Iron Age) for the periodization of prehistory, describing it as a Eurocentric and too simplistic epochalism, I nonetheless decided to still use this system, because the debate about it has not yet led to a commonly accepted new practice. Thus, the system is still prevalent, as it still serves the purpose of denoting prehistoric time periods in the most commonly known way, hence still facilitates understanding of history.

<sup>363</sup> This section rests on Gennadiy T. Bashkuyev, *Buryaty: traditsii i kul'tura / The Buryats: traditions and culture* (Ulan-Ude: Soyël, 1995); Nikita Ya. Bichurin (Hyakinth), *Denkwürdigkeiten über die Mongolei von dem Mönch Hyakinth*, aus dem Russischen übersetzt von Karl Friedrich von der Borg (Berlin: Reimer, 1832); Burchard Brentjes, *Die orientalische Welt* (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1970); idem, *Die Ahnen Dschingis-Chans* (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1988); Bair B. Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov'ya,” in *Istoriya Buryatii s drevneyshikh vremen do nachala XX veka*, ed. Yefrem Ye. Tarmakhanov (Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009), 46–73; Aleksandr A. Yelayev, *Buryatskiy narod: stanovleniye, razvitiye, samoopredeleniye* (Moskva: 2000); and Zhalsarayev, *Vremya. Sobytiya. Lyudi*, 8–14.

Asiatic Huns. It was they who founded and ruled the empire, but its population consisted of a great variety of different ethnic groups or 'tribes.' Most of them were highly mobile and quite bellicose nomads. Thus, in political terms, this empire was much more a (tribal) *union* or an *alliance* of various groups than a *state* with a strong central power. It is precisely this socio-political structure, which became the model followed by practically all the successor empires.

The date of the foundation of the Hunnish empire is known exactly, because from that time *written* sources are already available as Chinese chronicles include information about the *Hiung-Nu*. This together with valuable archaeological data from various sites, discovered all over the Inner Asian steppes, allows us to draw a quite detailed picture of their way of life. They were already advanced in metal working, which numerous findings of both bronze and iron arrow heads as well as of plowshares and sickles prove. The arrow heads point to their sophisticated weapons technology, of which the making of very effective composite recurve bows is probably most noteworthy. The plowshares and sickles attest that not only nomadic stock breeders made up the population, but that there were also sedentary agriculturalists. This is also proven by the Huns' diverse pottery and by the findings of sowing grain, which archaeologists made when excavating a fortified Hunnish urban settlement from the second century BCE in the village of Nizhnaya Ivolga, just across the southern city limits of Ulan-Ude, the capital of today's Republic of Buryatia. This site together with others in Buryatia show that this area constituted an integral part of the Hunnish Realm.

In the second half of the first century CE, China was eventually successful in overcoming the Hunnish 'plaguers,' who had habitually raided China. The Chinese first could establish a protectorate over the southern tribes of the Huns and then, in 93 CE, together with them and a newly emerged tribal union in the steppes, called *Hsien-Pi* in the Chinese chronicles, also defeated the northern Huns. The relief, however, was short, because this new union of nomads soon turned against their short-term allies and raided China for about the next 150 years.

In the first half of the third century, however, also the *Hsien-Pi*'s power declined, as now other tribes or ethnic groups, who nomadized in the steppes, could increase their power. Particularly two of them now began to dominate. The first were the *Toba*, who from the fourth to the sixth century dominated in the southern parts of the steppe and established there the first state-like polity in the history of the steppe. The second powerful tribe (or tribal union) was that of the *Zhuan-Zhuan*, who dominated in the north. The Baikal region, however, was disputed.

Twice, in 429 and 443, the Toba, who had turned their state formally into an empire in 398, invaded the area with armies led by the emperor.

Both the Toba and the Zhuan-Zhuan represented very large and very strong powers, in both political and military terms. They dominated the huge area from west of Korea to east of the Taklamakan Desert and from south of the Gobi desert up to the northern shores of Lake Baikal for about one and a half centuries. In both these dominions Buddhist monks were active in spreading their faith. In the middle of the sixth century, however, the rule of both of them ended. The fall of the empire of the Toba followed the pattern of the Huns' downfall, and we shall see precisely this pattern repeating again and again in the history of the steppe: after initially simply raiding and then ruthlessly exploiting the Chinese, all these steppe nomads to some degree succumb, over time, to the temptations of the Chinese civilization, as at least a part of them becomes sinicized in some way or other. This generates the seeds of scission, which, after they sprout, the Chinese cleverly use. They then eagerly fuel every inner conflict in the tribal unions until eventually the conflicting parties take up arms against each other and then the Chinese offer their military support to one of the warring parties, which usually accepts it uninhibitedly. We have seen this pattern happening in the downfall of the Huns and it has repeated in that of the Toba as well: in 535, after a civil war between insurgents, who opposed the heavy sinicization of the state, the empire split into two, an eastern and a western, both, naturally, now smaller and weaker. As a consequence both did not last very long after the split. The era of the Toba ended in 549 (Eastern) and 556 (Western), respectively.

The Chinese, however, could again not relax. To their bad luck, simultaneously with the demise of the Toba, another even stronger power extended its dominion up to the gates of their Great Wall (which, by the way, never provided them with any effective protection from attacking nomads). This new power constituted the *T'u-chüeh*, as they were called in the Chinese chronicles, i.e. the ancient Turks, usually referred to as *Göktürks*. Their original homeland was probably the Altai Mountains, from which they first, in the middle of the sixth century, turned to the east. In 553 they resoundingly defeated the Zhuan-Zhuan and subsequently utilized the power vacuum in the steppes north of China, which emerged there due to the Toba's contemporaneous decline. These Turkic tribes, however, must have possessed a significant martial supremacy at that time, because they were able to expand their rule in an enormous speed also to the west right afterwards. Only a few years later, around 570, they gained control over the largest area a

nomadic power hitherto did. Their rule stretched practically over the entire Eurasian steppe belt from the Yellow Sea in the east to the Black Sea in the west. In the early 550s they founded an empire,<sup>364</sup> the First Turkic Khanate, which later became subdivided into two federated khanates, an eastern and a western, thus repeating the familiar pattern. Again, after a period of absolute hegemony over the steppes and of being engaged in constant warfare with China, thus constituting a perpetual and grave danger for the Chinese, their inner conflicts eventually weakened them considerably. Hence, in 630, a Chinese army could defeat the army of the Eastern Turkic Khanate, which led to its collapse.

After that success China stayed relatively unmolested by raiders and invaders from the north for the relatively long period of about half a century, but then the reinvigorated Turks founded for a second time a huge and powerful khanate, which lasted from 683 to 745 and expanded again its rule over most parts of the Eurasian steppe belt. Thus, this empire was militarily and politically as powerful as its predecessors. But, in addition to that, it was also the first one which was literate, as the famous *Orkhon inscriptions* (named after the river Orkhon in Northern Mongolia, where the first of these inscriptions were discovered) date back to the Second Turkic Khanate. Inscriptions written in this runic script were found all over Northern China, Mongolia, and Southern Siberia. Since their decipherment in the late nineteenth century it is verified that they are written in Old Turkic. Therefore the Turkic Khanates are the first steppe empires of which we know for sure, what kind of language was spoken by its populations, or at least by their ruling classes. This language was a Turkic one. No clear evidence is available about what languages were in use in all prior empires.

The Turkic Khanates' type of rule was less confederal than that of the tribal unions of the prior empires. This on the one hand had probably helped them to establish those two empires of hitherto unprecedented expanse, but, on the other hand, also led to their decline, as around the turn of the seventh to the eighth century a union of tribes of different ethnic origin, but led by another Turkic-speaking group, the *Uighurs*, began with uprisings against the khan's yoke in Northern Mongolia and the Baikal region. In 716 the revolt reached its goal. The insurgents killed the khan and established their own rule in the eastern parts of the steppe belt.

---

<sup>364</sup> As regards the exact founding date of the empire, sources vary between 552 (e.g. Dashibalov, "Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov'ya," 54) and 554 (e.g. Yelayev, *Buryatskiy narod*, 33).

Even though the Uighurs, after the Second Turkic Khanate had formally ceased to exist (in 745), also founded a khanate (in 750), their rule was characterized by probably the highest degree of federalism of all the steppe empires, and hence represented a comparatively peaceful period of the history of Inner Asia. In the khanate's heartlands in Northern Mongolia, which included the area of today's Republic of Tyva (Tuva),<sup>365</sup> several big cities were built, in which trade flourished. Furthermore, in the Uighur period, agricultural activities increased considerably, thus subsistence economy became more diversified and no longer solely dependent on livestock breeding. In 840, nevertheless, also the Uighurs' reign came to an end. They were defeated by their northern neighbors, the also Turkic-speaking *Kirgiz*, whose original homeland was the region of the Minusinsk Basin, just north of Tuva. They, however, followed the tradition or, in other words, the familiar pattern: though they also founded a khanate, they did not interfere very much with the affairs of their vassals. Thus the Kirgiz Khanate also lasted quite long. They ruled until the beginning of the tenth century, when the reign of the Mongolian-speaking *Khitan* began, who brought the dominance of Turkic-speaking tribes in the eastern parts of the Eurasian steppe belt to a definite and permanent end.

The Khitan's original homeland was in the Barga region in today's northern part of Inner Mongolia, to the west of Manchuria. They once were vassals of the Uighur Khanate, but continuously gained power and eventually defeated the Koreans to their east and the Kirgiz to their west and thus became the supreme power in the eastern steppes. They, however, in distinction of all the prior steppe empires, fundamentally changed the form of the most important external relationship all these nomadic polities had, namely that with China: they did not content themselves with regularly *raiding* China, but *conquered* the northern part of it and took the throne of the Middle Kingdom for themselves. In 907 they founded the Liao Dynasty, which lasted more than two centuries until 1125. Thus, the Khitan were not only very strong in military terms, but the first nomadic power, which for a very long period of time could successfully integrate the amenities of the Chinese civilization into its traditional culture without having this

---

<sup>365</sup> In 1993, two years after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the republic's official name was changed from "Tuva", which was what the Russians had called it, to "Tyva", which is what the Tuvans themselves call it. This term, however, has not yet become common (or even known) outside of Tuva. Thus, in practically any literature, including scientific books and articles written in any language other than Tuvan, almost solely the forms "Tuva", "Tuvan", "Tuvans", etc., are still used. To avoid confusion, I have decided to principally use these forms too.



process of sinicization threatening their rule. We shall see this new pattern reemerging later in history.

### *The Baikal region in the time of the early steppe empires*

For most of the time in the nearly millennium and a half, from the Hunnish Empire up to the Liao Dynasty, the population groups, who settled in the region around Lake Baikal, were either tributary subjects of the above mentioned empires, or were confederate members of their unions. Therefore the socio-economic, cultural, and political influences of these various powerful polities were in many respects determinative for people's lives and the cultural developments in the Baikal region. In particular this can be proven for the last third of this period.

### *The Kurykan Culture (6th – 11th century CE) and the early stage of Buryat history*

Archaeologists pool together their findings around Lake Baikal, dated from the sixth to the eleventh century CE to the so-called *Kurykan Culture*,<sup>366</sup> which corresponds with Chinese chronicles of the same time period which contain information about certain “Kurykan” people. Famous are reports about the magnificent horses, which these ‘Kurykans’ gave as a present to the Chinese imperial court. One chronicle reports that these horses could run several hundreds of *li* on one day,<sup>367</sup> an endurance which made such a great impression at the court that some of the horses, as the chronicler tells, were even given honorific names.<sup>368</sup> For one thing this report proves that these ‘Kurykans’ had political relations with at least one of the powers competing for the control over the steppe, as they either wooed to maintain or to newly establish friendly relations with the Chinese. For another thing this report provides information about the

---

<sup>366</sup> Bair B. Dashibalov, *Archeologicheskiye pamyatniki kurykan i khori* (Ulan-Ude: BNTs SO RAN, 1995), 177; Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov’ya,” 51; Stanislav A. Gurulyev, *Chto v imeni tvoyem, Baykal?* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1991), 84–85. Archaeological material found further eastwards is linked to the *bayyrku*, who are mentioned in Old-Turkic inscriptions, and whom we know from Chinese chronicles as a numerous and particularly warlike people (Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov’ya,” 53). Unfortunately, not much more information is available about them, thus their connection with the people living near Lake Baikal, and whether they had influenced them in any way, is unknown (Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov’ya,” 54).

<sup>367</sup> One *li*, or Chinese mile, is about a third of a modern mile.

<sup>368</sup> Erdyneyeva and Chernov, *Geografiya Buryatii*, 64.

‘Kurykans’ culture or, at least, about one of their preoccupations: they obviously were excellent horse breeders.

About those ‘Kurykans’ cultural features we, however, know much more from archaeological data than from written sources.<sup>369</sup> Archaeologists discovered and excavated numerous fortified settlements belonging to this culture both to the west and to the east of Lake Baikal. In addition, in the same region petroglyphs dated to the same time period were found.<sup>370</sup> These petroglyphs depict most often mounted horses, but also some depictions of camels are among them. In many Kurykan graves cattle and sheep bones were found.<sup>371</sup> Thus, this data confirms that stock breeding was undoubtedly the ‘Kurykans’ main occupation. Other archaeological material, however, shows that agriculture played an important role as well. Seeds of millet, barley, rye, wheat, and hemp were found as well as such tools as cast-iron plowshares, wrought-iron sickles, and millstones. Growing all the grains was probably possible because it was also the ‘Kurykans,’ who dug the ancient irrigation channels, preserved in the Baikal region and still today partially in use for watering fields and hay meadows.<sup>372</sup> The knowledge of this technique most likely came to the region with migrants from Central Asia, probably Sogdians,<sup>373</sup> who made up a part of the population, which is proven by both typical Central Asian artifacts found in Kurykan sites,<sup>374</sup> and by the non-Mongoloid but Caucasoid type of some of the interred, whose remains have been excavated and anthropologically examined.<sup>375</sup>

In addition to the Chinese chronicles (and one single Persian source),<sup>376</sup> in regard to the ‘Kurykans’ we can also draw on the mentioned Orkhon inscriptions. One of them reports that in the winter of 552–553 “Kurykan” envoys attended the funeral ceremonies of Bumyn-Khan, the

---

<sup>369</sup> Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov’ya,” 53; Aleksey P. Okladnikov, “Ancient Population of Siberia and its Culture,” in *The Peoples of Siberia*, ed. M. G. Levin and L. Potapov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 89.

<sup>370</sup> Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov’ya,” 65.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Bakhayev and Shagdurova, *Istoriya Buryatii*, 17; Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu sredne-vekov’ya,” 65; Erdyneyeva and Chernov, *Geografiya Buryatii*, 64.

<sup>373</sup> Bakhayev and Shagdurova, *Istoriya Buryatii*, 17; Brentjes, *Die Ahnen Dschingis-Chans* 144.

<sup>374</sup> Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov’ya,” 67; Gurulyev, *Chto v imeni tvoyem, Baykal?*, 90.

<sup>375</sup> Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov’ya,” 67.

<sup>376</sup> This source is a statement of the Persian historian, traveler and geographer Abu Sa’id Abd al-Hayy Gardizi, who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. He mentions the tribal union of the *furi*, who are very likely identical with the *kurykan*, occupying the region east of the river Yenissey. Zhalsarayev, *Vremya. Sobytiya. Lyudi*, 15.

founder of the First Turkic Khanate.<sup>377</sup> Thus, at that time, they were obviously loyal to that newly arisen khanate. Later, however, they seceded and could successfully resist,<sup>378</sup> probably with the help of the Chinese, with whom they then became allied. We can conclude this not only from those amazing horses they sent to the Chinese court, but also from chronicles of the Tang Dynasty, which report four visits to the court by “Kurykan” delegations in the years of 629, 630, 647, and 659, respectively,<sup>379</sup> and that in 647 they even formally submitted themselves to the Tang emperor.<sup>380</sup> Later, at the end of the century, they took part in the successful rebellion of the Uighurs against the Turkic Khanate and subsequently became one of their vassals.<sup>381</sup> Thereafter they were under Kirgiz rule, and finally under that of the Kitan.

Thus, as every other group in the steppes has done likewise, also the ‘Kurykans’ switched their political and military alliance relationships several times: having originally been loyal to the Turkic Khanates, they gradually shifted (or had to shift) their support to other powers, which became dominant in the *eastern* parts of the Eurasian steppe belt. However, concerning *cultural* and *trade* relations, they maintained such with both the east and the west at all times, regardless to which power they, at times, belonged politically.

Already at this time the most valuable products, and thus articles of trade which could be harvested in the Baikal region, were furs and sable furs in particular. As they were in high demand in China, Central Asia, Persia, and Arabia, hunting for fur in the Baikal region was as important, if not even more important, than hunting for meat. Most likely it was the above mentioned migrants from Central Asia who carried on the lucrative fur trade,<sup>382</sup> which likely was also the very reason why they came there from so far away. We shall see this particular motive for migrating (or intruding) into the region repeating later in history.

Another example and clear proof of a *cultural* influence from Central Asia and Persia, i.e. from the *west*, is that among the ‘Kurykans’ also a runic script was in use, similar to that of the Old-Turkic Orkhon inscriptions and the Sogdian alphabet, then in use in Persia and Central Asia. Such runes were found among the already mentioned petroglyphs as well as on pottery and other

---

<sup>377</sup> Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov’ya.” 52; Gurulyev, *Chto v imeni tvoyëm, Baykal?*, 90.

<sup>378</sup> Brentjes, *Die Ahnen Dschingis-Chans*, 144.

<sup>379</sup> Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov’ya.” 68; Gurulyev, *Chto v imeni tvoyëm, Baykal?*, 90.

<sup>380</sup> Yelayev, *Buryatskiy narod*, 35.

<sup>381</sup> Gurulyev, *Chto v imeni tvoyëm, Baykal?*, 90; Taras M. Mikhaylov, “Buryaty,” in *Narody Rossii: Entsiklopediya*, ed. Valeriy A. Tishkov (Moskva: Bol’shaya rossiyskogo entsiklopediya, 1994), 119.

<sup>382</sup> Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov’ya,” 67.

objects. Although this writing system has not been deciphered yet, it is clearly different from the hieroglyphic scripts used in *East Asia*.<sup>383</sup>

In many other respects, however, features of the Kurykan Culture were very similar to typical *East Asian* cultural features. That applies to the semi-dugout shelters as well as to the fortified settlements with stone walls and stone paved roads, which archaeologists found in Kurykan sites. It is also true for their pottery, jewelry, cult objects, and for the artistic style of their petroglyphs.<sup>384</sup> Therefore the leading Buryat archaeologist of the last decades (until he—tragically and totally unexpectedly—passed away in 2011), Bair B. Dashibalov, stated that Mongolian tribes, which he regarded the bearers of the Kurykan Culture, always had close contacts particularly with China and were influenced by Chinese culture at all times.<sup>385</sup>

Dashibalov's statement leads us to the crucial question regarding the Kurykan Culture and its bearers with respect to the history of the Buryats. The question is *who* the bearers of this culture were. Where did they come from, what was their ethnicity, and which language did they speak? These questions are highly relevant in regard to the emergence of the Buryats, because the 'Kurykans,' or at least a considerable part of them, merged in the later population of the Baikal area, the greater part of which eventually became the Buryats.<sup>386</sup> Answers to these questions, however, are rather complex, and have thus been the subject of extensive debates among archaeologists, historians, linguists, ethnographers, and others, since the eighteenth century up to the present day.

As outlined above, archaeological and written sources show that the Kurykan Culture was obviously one in which elements from various cultures have intermixed. Furthermore it is clear that the population consisted of different groups of people in regard to both their preoccupation and their origin, as there were nomadic stock breeders as well as settled tillers of the soil and

---

<sup>383</sup> Bakhayev and Shagdurova, *Istoriya Buryatii*, 18; Dashibalov, "Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov'ya," 66–67; Gurulyev, *Chto v imeni tvojem, Baykal?*, 87–88.

<sup>384</sup> Dashibalov, "Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov'ya," 71–72.

<sup>385</sup> Bair B. Dashibalov, *Istoki: ot drevnikh khori-mongolov k buryatam. Ocherki* (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo nauchnogo tsentra SO RAN, 2003), 15–16.

<sup>386</sup> Vladimir B. Bakhayev, "Imeyetsya li etnicheskaya i kul'turnaya svyaz' mezhdru kurykanami i buryatami?" otvet 2 na vopros no.12 [second answer to question no. 12] in *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 1, ed. Taras M. Mikhaylov (Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1990), 42; Bakhayev and Shagdurova, *Istoriya Buryatii*, 18; Bulat R.-Kh. Zoriktuyev, "Imeyetsya li etnicheskaya i kul'turnaya svyaz' mezhdru kurykanami i buryatami?" otvet 1 na vopros no. 12 [first answer to question no. 12] in *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 1, ed. Taras M. Mikhaylov (Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1990), 39–40.

local people as well as migrants. Therefore, it is important to determine the makeup of all those empires which preceded and existed at one time with the Kurykan Culture, because parts of them must have also made up the population, which created this culture.

As stated above, the Huns, the Hsien-Pi, the Toba, and the Zhuan-Zhuan were all nonliterate, and thus none of them left behind any written records of their own. As the Chinese chronicles, which in general are highly valuable for clarifying and illuminating many things in regard to these ancient steppe people and their empires, are also unfortunately silent about their languages and origins, much room for speculations is left in this regard. And, as if that weren't enough, these speculations have been and still are often more fueled by ideological and political concerns than they are based on sound scientific considerations, especially in Soviet and in today's post-Soviet times.

In the eighteenth century, the French scholar Joseph de Guignes reckoned the Huns to have been *Turkic* on the basis of a handful of Hunnish words he believed to be of Turkic origin.<sup>387</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century his view was shared by the German orientalist Julius Klaproth and Carl Ritter,<sup>388</sup> but was opposed by Father Hyacinth, a sinologist from Russia (civil name: Nikita Yakovlevich Bichurin), and Carl Friedrich Neumann, another German orientalist of that time.<sup>389</sup> Hyacinth stated that the populations of all those empires, beginning with that of the Huns and continuing with the Hsien-Pi's, the Toba's, the Zhuan-Zhuan's empires, and including also the Turkic khanates, were always the *same Mongolian* people, but who changed their name several times, because it was customary to adopt the name of the respective ruling clan as a name for the whole people.<sup>390</sup> That way Hyacinth audaciously tried to resolve the whole problem in one go.

---

<sup>387</sup> Joseph de Guignes, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Hunnen und Türken, der Mogols und anderer occidentalischen Tartarn, vor und nach Christi Geburt bis auf jetzige Zeiten* (Greifswald 1770), 261, cited in *M Alexander Castrén's ethnologische Vorlesungen über die altaischen Völker nebst samojedischen Märchen und tatarischen Heldensagen*, ed. Anton Schiefner (St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1857), 36.

<sup>388</sup> *M Alexander Castrén's ethnologische Vorlesungen über die altaischen Völker nebst samojedischen Märchen und tatarischen Heldensagen*, ed. Anton Schiefner (St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1857), 36.

<sup>389</sup> Bichurin, *Denkwürdigkeiten über die Mongolei*, 167–68; Carl Friedrich Neumann, *Die Völker des südlichen Russlands in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Leipzig 1847), 30, cited in Castrén, *Ethnologische Vorlesungen*, 36.

<sup>390</sup> Bichurin, *Denkwürdigkeiten über die Mongolei*, 167–68

Around the middle of the nineteenth century the Finno-Swedish philologist and ethnographer Mathias Alexander Castrén, who carefully scrutinized the problem and the works of his colleagues, and who undertook two long journeys to Siberia, was the first who considered the Huns to have, most likely, not been a single ethnic group, but rather comprised several different ethnic groups. In his opinion, among these groups were both Turkic *and* Mongolian tribes and presumably also Manchu-Tungusic and perhaps even Finnish tribes.<sup>391</sup> With regards to the Finns he was left alone with this opinion, but concerning the three other groups his postulation that a composition of them has made up the empire has been followed by many other researchers. Today, this concept is also extended to all the other empires and khanates which followed that of the Huns, viewing all of them as *unions* of groups, and consisting precisely of representatives of these three, i.e. Turkic, Mongolian and Manchu-Tungusic, ethno-linguistic groups. What has changed repeatedly in the course of history, was only who of them held the leadership in these unions. Thus, in a way, a combined Castrénian-Hyakinthian approach seems to be most appropriate. Nonetheless have after Castrén, due to ideological and political reasons, single-ethnic concepts prevailed in this debate.

Soviet ethnography and historiography had to act on the maxim that an outside or foreign influence in any historical process regarding a ‘Soviet people’ had to either play an unimportant role or none at all. Furthermore, long- and short-term political considerations often exercised strong influence over scientists’ theories. One example is Soviet leading post-World War Two ethnographer Sergey A. Tokarev. In his influential article “On the Origin of the Buryat Nation,” published in 1953,<sup>392</sup> he aimed at downplaying the Mongolian component in the “ethnogenesis” of the Buryats. In doing so he complied with both the Russians’ common resentments towards anything Mongolian (which derives from classifying Genghis Khan’s rule and the ‘Mongolian yoke’ as inhuman, feudalistic, and reactionary) and with the politically stipulated assertion that the Buryats have not much in common with the Mongols (which derived for fear of Pan-Mongolian movements at the time the article was published). In his article Tokarev takes the starting point that “it is quite probable” that in the Hunnish tribal union “Turkic elements played

---

<sup>391</sup> Castrén, *Ethnologische Vorlesungen*, 36.

<sup>392</sup> Sergey A. Tokarev, “O proiskhozhdenii buryatskogo naroda,” *Sovetskaya etnografiya* 2 (1953): 37–52. The article was republished in English under the title “On the Origin of the Buryat Nation” in *Studies in Siberian Ethnogenesis*, edited by Henry N. Michael (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 102–18.

an important role.”<sup>393</sup> Out of this he then audaciously concludes that “[t]o this period of Hun supremacy, i.e., the beginning of our era, the ‘Turkization’ of the population of the [...]Baikal region should probably assigned.”<sup>394</sup> As regards the ‘Kurykans,’ he has already “no doubt that” they “were a Turkic speaking people,” because for him “several inscriptions in the Orkhon script” prove this sufficiently.<sup>395</sup>

For decades this biased view dominated the discussion about the ethno-linguistic composition of the ‘Kurykans’ and hence those of the Buryats. Only in the late perestroika-period and then, to a higher degree, in the early post-Soviet years, the debate was reinvigorated. In 1997, Buryat historian Dorzho V. Tsybikdorzhiev brought forward etymological arguments which proved that all the ethnonyms of the tribes, which according to Chinese chronicles settled in the Baikal region up to the sixth century CE, were all unambiguously of a Mongolian origin.<sup>396</sup> His view has been shared by many others, and especially the Hsien-Pi are now widely considered as the Proto- or ancient Mongols<sup>397</sup> and as having settled in the Baikal region no later than in the third century CE.<sup>398</sup> From this it is concluded that, when the Turkic tribes intruded the Baikal region in the sixth century, it was descendents of the Hsien-Pi who for a considerable part formed the local, then already aboriginal, population there.

In conclusion, what won through in the early post-Soviet years was a diametrically opposite approach to that of Tokarev and of the Soviet period in general. The structure of the argument, however, was of striking analogousness, as the ‘Turkic elements’ were simply replaced by ‘Mongolian’ ones. Now the latter were viewed as the oldest and ‘aboriginal’ ones, and hence as the most influential elements in the process of the formation of both the Kurykan Culture and of the modern Buryat nation.

---

<sup>393</sup> Sergey A. Tokarev, “On the Origin of the Buryat Nation,” in *Studies in Siberian Ethnogenesis*, ed. Henry N. Michael (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 103.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Dorzho V. Tsybikdorzhiev, “Onim kak glavnyj simvol cheloveka, etnosa i gosudarstva u mongolov,” in *Doklady i tezisy Mezhdunarodnogo simpoziuma “Buryat-mongoly nakanune III tysyacheletiya: opyt kochevoy tsivilizatsii, Rossiya-Vostok-Zapad v sud’be naroda” (24–28 avgusta 1997g.)*, ed. Irina S. Urbanayeva, Larisa D. Nikiforova and S. D. Batomunkuyev (Ulan-Ude: BNTs, 1997), 19.

<sup>397</sup> Dashibalov, *Istoki*, 14; Yelayev, *Buryatskiy narod*, 31.

<sup>398</sup> Brentjes, *Die Ahnen Dschingis-Chans*, 122; Daba D. Nimayev, *Problemy etnogeneza buryat* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1988), 51.

However, what has changed in the perestroika and post-Soviet times is that after *Tungusic* ‘elements’ had been either totally disregarded or widely neglected for a long time, the role Tungusic tribes have played in these processes was given new attention. In his groundbreaking book *“Problemy etnogeneza buryat”*, published in 1988, the Buryat ethnographer Daba D. Nimayev stresses that connections between the ancestors of the Buryats and Tungusic tribes can be traced back to very early times, when both of them were still living in forested areas and subsisted mainly on hunting and fishing. According to him about two dozens of Tungusic groups were adopted in the compound ethnic body of the Buryats. Furthermore the Buryat language, though clearly a Mongolian one, was significantly influenced by the *Evenk* language, the language of the Tungusic people predominant in Siberia including the Baikal region, in regard to both lexis and phonetics,<sup>399</sup> which implies that this process is age-old. This view is shared today by practically all researchers who deal with this topic. For example, Dashibalov has recently corroborated Nimayev’s findings, as he pointed out that also the Buryat material culture has a “forestal complex” and that the Buryat decorative art has been significantly influenced by those of the Evenks.<sup>400</sup> And that the interrelations between Mongolian and Tungusic tribes and their mutual cultural influences upon each other are of old age is affirmed also by the findings of the Chinese researcher Fang Zhuang-You who analyzed the Hsien-Pi words, which preserved in Chinese chronicles, and concluded that the Hsien-Pi constituted a mixed Mongolian-Tungusic people.<sup>401</sup>

Thus, when the Turkic tribes intruded the Baikal region in the sixth century, they encountered there surely both Mongolian *and* Tungusic tribes. Consequently, the Kurykan Culture, which has thereafter developed there, was made up of exactly these *three* different ethno-linguistic groups, Turkic, Mongolian, and Tungusic, respectively.

However, what remains a matter of debate is the meaning and origin of the term “kurykan”, which in both the Orkhon inscriptions and the Chinese chronicles obviously refers to all three these population groups of the Baikal region altogether. In 1974 the Russian historian and philologist Vladimir V. Svinin published his interpretation of one of the Orkhon inscriptions,

---

<sup>399</sup> Daba D. Nimayev, “Kakova rol’ tungusskikh plemen v protsesse slozheniya buryat?” in *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 1, ed. Taras M. Mikhaylov (Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1990), 47; idem, *Problemy etnogeneza buryat*, 135.

<sup>400</sup> Dashibalov, “Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov’ya,” 70–71.

<sup>401</sup> Fang Zhuang-You, “Xianbei Yuyan Kao,” *Yanjing Xuebao [Yanjing Journal]* 8 (1930): 1468.



which proposes a riddle. In this inscription a tribal union by the name of “*üç kurykan*” is mentioned, which can only refer to the Kurykans. “Üç” means “three” in all Turkic languages. Thus this inscription, Svinin concluded, could be one more proof that this union was made up of three members. The meaning of the word *kurykan*, however, is not conclusively clear. Svinin however noticed that similar sounding words in the Evenk, Mongolian, Buryat, and Turkmen languages have an identical meaning, namely “good brother” (i.e. “brother in law”). From this he concludes, or rather proposes, that the name of the tribal union can be read as the “three good brothers (in law)”. These “brothers” were, in Svinin’s view, very likely the three ethnic groups of which the union was made up.<sup>402</sup> His theory was, however, rarely taken up by other researchers. In Soviet times it contradicted the dictated maxim of asserting a single-ethnic dominance in these ethnogenetic processes, and in 2003 another interpretation of that mysterious Orkhon inscription has been proposed. The Buryat historian Bair Z. Nanzatov discovered that in Old Turkic actually a term had existed, which coincides with “kurykan”, namely “*quriqan*”, which had the meaning of “camp” as well as “military camp”. Consequently he concluded that the expression in the inscription translates as “three military camps.” Those had, in Nanzatov’s view, been in all likelihood garrisons, established by the First Turkic Khanate for ensuring its control over the population of the Baikal region, and in particular for squeezing out of them as much fur tribute as possible.<sup>403</sup> As stated above, already back then furs were a commodity in high demand and brought high earnings to those who possessed or traded them. However, to get in possession of that treasury the Khanate depended on tributary forest people, because they were the only ones who were skilled and experienced enough in hunting fur animals. Thus, writes Nanzatov, the Khanate tried to make sure to hold and maintain a tight control over the region by stationing troops of a stately size there. This in turn, reasons Nanzatov, created a considerable follow-up migration of various needed specialists—blacksmiths, builders, agriculturalists, merchants, etc.<sup>404</sup> As a consequence the population of the region became a very diverse one. The plurale tantum “*üç kurykan*”, originally a mere technical or administrative term, was evidently highly

---

<sup>402</sup> Vladimir V. Svinin, “Osnovnye etapy drevney istorii naseleniya poberezh’ya ozera Baykal,” in *Drevnyaya istoriya narodov yuga Vostochnoy Sibiri* (Irkutsk 1974), 18–20.

<sup>403</sup> Bair Z. Nanzatov, “K etnogenezu buryat po materialam etnonimii,” in *Narody i kul’tury Sibiri. Vzaimodeystviye kak faktor formirovaniya i modernizatsiya*, issue 2, ed. Mikhail G. Turov (Irkutsk: Irkutskiy Mezhhregional’nyy institut obshchestvennykh nauk, 2003), 30–31.

<sup>404</sup> Nanzatov, “K etnogenezu buryat,” 31.

suitable for addressing this mixed nature of that people, and hence became used as the generic name for them, even after they seceded from the Khanate.

In my view, although these two interpretations of the inscription are mutually exclusive as regards the literal meaning of the term “kurykan,” the conclusions drawn are essentially the same: the population in the Baikal region was mixed and heterogeneous, made up by aboriginal (or autochthonous) *and* immigrant groups. Among the former were certainly Tungusic tribes, among the latter for sure Turkic groups. Mongolian or Proto-Mongolian tribes were for sure among the latter, but, as some have settled there probably very early in history, possibly among both of them. Moreover, the population was not only diverse in ethnic and linguistic terms, but also in terms of occupation, as there were hunters, stock breeders, agriculturalists, craftsmen, traders, military men, etc. Still further, the population also varied with regard to the conducted ways of life, as some were nomads, whereas others remained sedentary.

These diverse population groups did not become merged, at least not totally, as there is clear historic evidence that tribes of different ethnic identities—Turkic, Tungusic, and Mongolian—continued to exist, when the Kurykan Culture eventually declined in the beginning of the second millennium CE. However, they mutually influenced each other in cultural terms to a high degree and represented typical ‘Baikalian’ types, distinct and different from other Turkic, Tungusic, and Mongolian cultures.

Thus, and to conclude, first there no longer remains any doubt that all these three ethnic ‘elements’ have played an important role in the process that led to the emergence of the Buryats and that this process’s first and foundational stage took place in the time of the ‘Kurykans.’ Second, notwithstanding constant outside influence by both cultural transfer and actual immigration of new population groups, this process took place for the most part in the region itself, and hence bears to a high degree an autochthonous character, especially regarding its early stage. That, however, was a little less the case in the next stage.

### ***The Mongolian period (10<sup>th</sup> – mid-17<sup>th</sup> century)***

The first empire, which was with certainty led by Mongolian-speaking people, was that of the Khitan, whose rise to power began in the ninth century. In the early tenth century they had become so powerful that they, as also already mentioned, could ascend the throne of an emperor

of China. In 907 they founded the Liao Dynasty, which ruled Northern China, Manchuria and the Mongolian steppes for more than two centuries and made Southern China tributary to them for a whole century. Their uncontested ascendancy also facilitated the steady increase of other Mongolian tribes associated with them, in terms of both their population sizes and their political power.<sup>405</sup>

As a consequence, the Baikal region's ethnic composition also changed significantly. Written, archaeological, and etymological sources clearly show that from the ninth century onwards, Mongolian-speaking tribes immigrated in steadily increasing numbers, whereas the Turkic part of the population gradually decreased there.<sup>406</sup> Thus, the ethnically balanced make-up of the Kurykan Culture came to an end. From the eleventh century onwards Mongolian ethnic groups dominated in the Baikal region.<sup>407</sup> Khitan influence in the Baikal region is evidently proved by archaeological findings: in graves ascribed to the late Kurykan period, vessels of typical Khitan type were found.<sup>408</sup>

Thus, people there most likely had a share in the intellectual achievements of the Khitan too, for instance, their use of two types of writing systems (or scripts), one of a Chinese (hieroglyphic) style and one alphabetic (with letters similar to those of the Uighur script). Also noteworthy is that the Khitan attached prime importance to education. They ran institutions of higher education, which were attended by students from all quarters of their empire, and thus knowledge was spread all over.<sup>409</sup> This can equally be said about Buddhism, because although shamanism remained the predominant faith, Buddhism spread considerably, particularly among the nobility.<sup>410</sup>

The downfall of this powerful empire, however, largely followed the already well-known pattern. In the early twelfth century, internal feuds weakened them so much that, when their enemies to the north, the Manchu-Tungusic tribe of the Jurchen, together with the Song Dynasty of South China, took coordinated military action against them, their empire collapsed and was

---

<sup>405</sup> Bair Taysayev, "Serye volki," *Buryatiya*, no. 249–51 (1993): p. 3.

<sup>406</sup> Bakhayev and Shagdurova, *Istoriya Buryatii*, 18; E. Dobolova, "Kurykane i buryatskiye plemena," *Buryatiya*, June 19, 1997: p. 5; Taras M. Mikhaylov, "Kakova istoriya Buryatii v period mongol'skogo vladichestva (XII–XVI vv.)?" in *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 1, ed. Taras M. Mikhaylov (Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1990), 50; Yelayev, *Buryatskiy narod*, 37.

<sup>407</sup> Mikhaylov, "Kakova istoriya Buryatii," 50.

<sup>408</sup> Dashibalov, "Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov'ya," 58.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*; Zhalsarayev, *Vremya. Sobytiya. Lyudi*, 15.

succeeded by the Jin dynasty, founded by the Jurchen. They, however, could not expand their rule into the steppe regions. There, the various other Mongolian tribes had already gained so much power that the demise of the Khitan did not have any effect on them.

The largest of these tribes were the *Tatar*, *Kereit*, *Naiman*, *Merkit*, and *Bordzhigin*. The Merkit settled in the region, which today is made up of the southern districts of the Republic of Buryatia. The territory ranging from there to the north shores of Lake Baikal and to the steppes beyond the lake was called *Bargudzhin-Tokum*. In the Khitan era, many new Mongolian tribes immigrated into this region and further expelled considerable parts of its former population, in particular Turkic tribes.

After long and bloody feuds were fought around the turn of the thirteenth century, it was the Bordzhigin who gained suzerainty among the Mongolian tribes.<sup>411</sup> The headman of this tribe was Temudzhin. In 1206, two years after he finally could defeat the Merkit (his most inveterate enemies), a *khuriltay*—an assembly of all Mongolian tribes' headmen—formally elected him as leader of all Mongols and awarded him the title “Genghis Khan”.

From various sources—among them the “Secret History of the Mongols,” the famous Mongolian chronicle from the thirteenth century—we know that many of the tribes of Bargudzhin-Tokum, i.e. the land around Lake Baikal, already had friendly relations with the Bordzhigin *before* Genghis Khan became the supreme leader of the Mongols, and had voluntarily submitted themselves to him in 1189 or in 1201.<sup>412</sup> The tribes who were tributaries to the Merkit fell to Genghis Khan, when he defeated them in 1204.<sup>413</sup> Thus, the tribes settling in the Baikal region became loyal to Temudzhin, and even became his comrades in arms, in an early state of his rise to power. This is important to state, because it is further proof that the assertion that Mongolian people came into the Baikal region only *after* Genghis Khan or his

---

<sup>411</sup> Brentjes, *Die orientalische Welt*, 422.

<sup>412</sup> Concerning the year, in which this submission happened, statements vary. Zhalsarayev ascribes it to the year 1201 (Zhalsarayev, *Vremya. Sobytiya. Lyudi*, 17), but, for instance, Ssanang Ssetsen, a Mongolian chronicler of the seventeenth century, wrote that it already took place in 1189 (Ssanang Ssetsen, *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen*, 75). Both years may be the right one, as a difference of twelve years in different statements in regard to the date of the same event is a frequent occurrence in literature about medieval Mongolian history, because the Mongolian and Buddhist calendars, respectively, are based on repetitive cycles of twelve years and every year is given the name of one of twelve different animals. Thus, every twelfth year bears the same name, which, in case no additional specifications are given, makes the determination of the exact date a matter of approximation or mere estimation. The best known example for this is the two different years that can be found in literature for the birth of Genghis Khan, 1155 and 1167, respectively.

<sup>413</sup> Zhalsarayev, *Vremya. Sobytiya. Lyudi*, 17.

descendants had conquered it, which was stereotypically repeated for decades in Soviet literature,<sup>414</sup> is wrong. In this region Mongolian tribes had settled already centuries earlier, and by the time of Genghis Khan, they had already become the dominating ethnic group there.

Of the tribes who voluntarily submitted to Genghis Khan, the *Bargut* were those who had the best and closest relations with the Bordzhigin. It is, for example, known that Genghis Khan's grandfather was married to a Bargut woman<sup>415</sup> and Rashid ad-Din, the famous Persian historian and statesman of the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, reports that the Bargut received the khan's ambassadors with cheers<sup>416</sup> and that he later made two Barguts commanders-in-chief of his military.<sup>417</sup> Furthermore, we know from the "Secret History" that the Bordzhigin also had old kinship ties with the *Khori*, another large tribe who settled in the Baikal region.<sup>418</sup> Hence the Mongolian tribes there had, in the main, close ties with Genghis Khan and thus played an active role in the gigantic political, social, and ethnic upheaval of Eurasia, which followed.

Genghis Khan and his descendents, as is known, conquered an enormous part of that continent and established the largest continuous land empire in human history. The military skills of the Mongols are legendary. They were the unchallenged superior military power of their time. Unprecedented skills in horse riding and archery, in combination with innovative tactics and strict discipline, made them almost invincible. Furthermore, they carried out their campaigns with utmost cruelty, killing everybody who dared oppose them. This, however, was only one of their traits. After they had successfully carried out a conquest, they quickly reversed their policy towards the newly subjugated to one of pronounced tolerance in regard to their social, cultural and religious affairs. To everybody in their huge empire, no matter their ethnic identity, religious freedom was granted, and no restrictions whatsoever were imposed in regard to languages, economic activities, or ways of life. Rather to the opposite, the Mongols tried to stimulate and support trade and cultural exchange as much as they could. Thus, in the late decades of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century, the whole empire prospered both

---

<sup>414</sup> Taras M. Mikhaylov, "Kakova istoriya Buryatii," 56.

<sup>415</sup> Zoriktuyev, "Vzaimootnosheniya plemen Pribykal'ya i Mongolii v epokhu Chingis-khana," in *Taynaya istoriya mongolov: istochnikovedeniye, istoriya, filologiya*, ed. B. Z. Bazarova and Prokopy B. Kononov (Novosibirsk 1995), 91–95.

<sup>416</sup> Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisej*, vol. 1, book 1 (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1952), 166.

<sup>417</sup> Rashid ad-Din, *Sbornik letopisej*, 117, 121–22.

<sup>418</sup> See e.g. the Russian translation of the "Secret History" by Ch.-R. Namzhilov and S. Kozin, *Mongoloy nyuusa tobsho. Sokrovennoye skazaniye mongolov* (Ulan-Ude: 1990), 13.

economically and culturally. It was during the Mongol rule of China, the Yuan Dynasty (1271 - 1368), when paper money was invented. This could only be done in a stable and well-functioning economy which was built on trust and security. In fact, the 'brutal' military campaigns and conquests created a peaceful environment all over the empire, which improved life for everybody and made great cultural achievements possible. To give only one more example, more than one hundred new towns were founded and built during the heyday of the Mongolian Empire, and *without* town walls!<sup>419</sup> This '*Pax Mongolica*' was what the Mongols engendered in the first place.

But yet, as Bair Dashibalov has stated with near certainty, "in those days the world did not understand the great plan of the Mongols and was not yet ready for their ideas."<sup>420</sup> I, however, would add that they themselves weren't ready either. It was Genghis Khan himself who sowed the seeds of discord when he ordered that, after his death, the empire should be subdivided into four parts to make all his four sons khans, but that the one who ruled the heartland, i.e. the Mongolian steppes, should be the 'great khan' holding the supreme power. This plan did not work out. In defiance of what was possibly Genghis Khan's greatest achievement, namely, the unification of all Mongolian tribes, they split apart anew, and rivalries and fights broke out again. As a first step of this process, the suzerainty of the great khan was no longer recognized by the three other khans. As a second step, clan feuds within the sub-khanates started, which soon developed into full-fledged tribal wars.

In addition, the Mongols did quickly assimilate to the cultures of all the areas they had conquered. In the western parts of their empire they converted to Islam and in China to Buddhism and they either became Arabized, Persianized, Turkisized, or Sinisized. Thus, the familiar pattern of the steppe empires' demise was repeated also by the Mongols. As early as in the course of the fourteenth century, three of the four sub-khanates one after the other collapsed.

The longest lasting of the four sub-khanates was the 'Golden Horde,' which had its center on the lower streams of the river Volga. Under its rule the political landscape of Russia considerably changed. After the Mongols annihilated the Kievan Rus in the thirteenth century, the Grand Dukes of Moscow, after having seen their town raided and burnt down by the armies of the Horde several times, became the Horde's best tax payers in the fourteenth century. In turn, its

---

<sup>419</sup> Dashibalov, "Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov'ya," 61.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 60, translation mine.

khans granted the Muscovites a privileged status among the Russian principalities which, essentially, meant that they less frequently raided them than the others. As a consequence the Grand Duchy of Moscow obtained supremacy among the Russian principalities in the fifteenth century, which it would never lose again. Thus, it was, in fact, the Mongols themselves who engendered Moscow's rise, a move which not so much later in history would lead to reverse power relations between them. And it was precisely this development, which became crucial for the Baikal region and thus for the Buryats' fate too.

In the fourteenth century, however, the Baikal region remained a part of the Mongolian hemisphere. Genghis Khan's policy of detribalization, that is, that he either dissolved the tribes he had defeated or incorporated them into his creation of an all-Mongolian 'superethnos,' did, however, not last very long. Soon after his death, the age-old systemic process of rivaling patrilineal clans, which in the course of time developed into separate tribes and eventually into distinguished ethnic groups, started up again. Already in the middle of the fifteenth century, four groups of Mongols had developed distinct identities. In the central and eastern parts of the territory of the modern Mongolian state settled the *Khalkha*. To the southeast, i.e. closer to China and roughly congruent with what is today's China's autonomous province of *Inner Mongolia*, the *Tsakhar* had their pastures. To the west of the *Khalkha*, in a territory including the western parts of modern Mongolia and the whole Dzungarian basin, the *Oirat* settled. And the fourth group constituted the tribes who settled in *Ara Mongolia*,<sup>421</sup> which translates as "Back-Mongolia," meaning the land at the northern fringe, i.e. the region *beyond* Lake Baikal and *behind* the Sayan mountains, as viewed from the Mongolian heartland.

Up to the first decades of the eighteenth century, constantly ongoing feuds and wars between most of these groups, and even within them, determined the course of the Mongolian history. The major conflict was between the *Khalkha* and the *Oirat*.<sup>422</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, this internal Mongolian conflict significantly contributed to the loss of sovereignty of all four groups, as two mighty empires—one to the south and one to the north—could simultaneously exploit to their advantages the disunity and enfeeblement of the Mongols.

In *Ara Mongolia*, however, the situation prior to this final development was somewhat more stable because this region was, albeit not totally, but to a certain degree separated by the natural

---

<sup>421</sup> B. Vasil'yev, "Sberegi yazyk, togda sberezhem narod," *Buryatiya*, July 2, 1997: p. 7.

<sup>422</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 93.

barriers of Lake Baikal and the Sayan Mountains from the vast and mostly wide open steppe lands in which the other three Mongolian groups feuded with each other. Therefore, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, there could evolve out of the above described Mongolian-Tungusic-Turkic ethnic and cultural blend those tribes which still today make up the core and majority of the Buryat nation, the *Ekhirit*, *Bulagat*, *Khori*, and *Khongodor* tribes, respectively.<sup>423</sup> Later in the course of this process, the Khori, but also parts of the other three tribes crossed Lake Baikal and settled in the steppes to the east of it too.<sup>424</sup> In the seventeenth century, this migration process was further fostered by the conquest of the region by its new overlords, who would rule there until the present day. This also closed the chapter of *Mongolian* dominance of the Baikal region, which lasted over three thirds of a millennium, and therefore left behind the most decisive and significant marks in Buryat culture. They are without any doubt a Mongolian people. They, however, differ considerably in many respects from the Mongols proper. This is, for one thing, a consequence of those significant Tungusic and Turkic influences, which had impinged on them for a long period too, and, as regards the Tungusic influence, continued to do so further on. For another thing, it is due to one of the major turnarounds in Eurasian history to which I shall get on to in the next section.

### ***The Tsarist period (17<sup>th</sup> – early-20<sup>th</sup> century)***

#### *The Russian conquest of the Baikal region*

By the end of the fifteenth century, the Grand Duchy of Moscow, which, as described, gained its leadership among the Russian principalities with significant Mongolian help, could shake off their ‘yoke’ and rose to become the sole power in the Volga region. It subjected all other Russian principalities and, in the midst of the sixteenth century, it subdued the first *non-Russian* polities, the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, respectively. Grand Duke Ivan the Fourth, the ‘Terrible’, declared himself “*gosudar*,” the “sovereign ruler,” i.e. *tsar*, and the Muscovite state’s rise to an imperial power took off.

---

<sup>423</sup> Larisa P. Pavlinskaya, *Buryaty. Ocherki etnicheskoy istorii (XVII–XIX vv.)* (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo “Evropeyskiy Dom,” 2008), 245.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.



What makes this relevant to Buryat history, is that this new power oriented its efforts towards the east. It was Siberia, and its abundance of fur-bearing animals, and thus of precious pelts, which (still) were a highly demanded and high priced commodity, which was the logical next goal of Moscow's expansionism. It started its conquest of Siberia in the last quarter of the sixteenth century.

Cossack hetman Yermak Timofeyevich's campaign across the Urals in 1581–82, which succeeded in the defeat of the Khanate *Sibir* on the river Ob', marks the beginning of this conquest. It pushed open the door to this 'paradise' which promised wealth for everyone who did not fear the cold and manifold dangers that this quite harsh paradise had ready. Thus the Russian 'fur rush' set in. Cossack squad after Cossack squad was furnished and headed off. Ever further and ever quicker they penetrated into unknown lands. *Ostrog* after *ostrog* was built—forts which served as bases for further advances and as fortified storage places for the furs they extorted from the natives. Tribe after tribe was subjugated. They were forced to swear a *shert*, an oath to be eternally loyal to the tsar and to pay *yasak*, i.e. tribute, to him. This *yasak* was then taken from them by force and consisted most often solely of furs.

Most of Siberia's native people were small in number, with only a loosely social organization, inexperienced in conducting greater military action, and had weaponry far inferior to those of the Russians. That made it possible that in 1638, only about half a century after the conquest had started, a Cossack squad, commanded by a certain Moskvitin, reached the coast of the Pacific Ocean, well over five thousand miles to the east of Moscow.<sup>425</sup> However, Moskvitin and his men clapped their eyes on the Pacific Ocean far in the north, namely at the mouth of the small river Ulya near today's town Okhotsk. That was because the 'southern passage'—along the mighty streams of the river Amur and to ice-free sea bays—was then nowhere near to being open to the Russians, because by that time their advance in the south didn't even proceed half the way to the Pacific Ocean. In what follows I will describe the reasons for this.

In 1609 from Tomsk, located near the lower stream of the river Ob' and at that time the main ostrog and the logistic center for the Russians' conquest of Siberia, a Cossack squad set off with the order to advance to the east of the Minusinsk Basin and to subjugate the people who settled there and collect *yasak* from them. The Cossacks succeeded in regard to the first two of these three goals: they reached their destination and the *Samoyed* and *Ket* tribes, who settled there,

---

<sup>425</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 81.

took the *shert*'. However, they told the disenchanting Cossacks that they were unable to pay any yasak, because they just had paid tribute to certain Buryats who settled further east and to whom they were subjugated before and even had to provide warriors. This was the first the Russians heard about the Buryats.<sup>426</sup> Bewildered, they did not make any attempt to advance further to the south-east into the land of those Buryats for twenty years.<sup>427</sup>

When they eventually started their conquest of the Baikal region, it indeed turned out to be a difficult task. The region was much more densely inhabited than Western and Northern Siberia. It was, as delineated above, mainly Buryat(-Mongolian) and Evenk tribes who settled there. The Evenks made their living for the most part by hunting and gathering as well as by reindeer breeding. The Buryats were steppe nomads and, although at that time only slightly greater in number than the other ethnic groups settling in the region, dominated in terms of military and economic power. In Ara Mongolia, that is, from the Russians' point of view, in *Cis-Baikalia*,<sup>428</sup> as for them it was not beyond but *before* Lake Baikal, the Buryats had made most of the Evenk, Ket, and Samoyed tribes tributary to them.<sup>429</sup>

As elaborated above the ancestors of those Buryat-Mongolian tribes were prominently involved in Genghis Khan's and his descendants' military campaigns. In the post-imperial centuries, notwithstanding their location on the fringe of the Mongolian hemisphere, they were nevertheless to a certain degree embroiled in the constant inner-Mongolian conflicts, most often regulated by feuds and tribal wars. Thus, the Buryats were experienced warriors with excellent

---

<sup>426</sup> Bakhayev and Shagdurova, *Istoriya Buryatii*, 29; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 87; Yefgeniy M. Yegorov, "Istoricheskoye znachenie pokhoda khori-buryat 1702–1703 gg. k Petru I," in *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 1, ed. Yefgeniy M. Yegorov (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2001), 7.

<sup>427</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 87. It is not unlikely that fears of an imminent attack on Tomsk had contributed to this quite unusual wait-and-see strategy for Russia's otherwise relentless advance into Siberia. In the early 1620s, rumors spread that large united forces of the Kalmyks, the Kirghiz, and the Buryats, respectively, prepared such an attack on Tomsk (Pavlinskaya, *Buryaty*, 83). Prior to that, but equally probable, the turmoil in the Russian state in the early seventeenth century may also have contributed to this hesitancy, as this 'Time of Troubles' climaxed in a phase of no government at all from 1609 to 1612 (Robert W. Montgomery, *Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Nationality and Cultural Policy: The Buryats and their Language* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 62; Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 157–92).

<sup>428</sup> In Russian "Предбайкалье (*Predbaykal'e*)" in distinction from "Забайкалье (*Zabaykal'e*)", which latter translates as "*Trans-Baikalia*".

<sup>429</sup> Bakhayev and Shagdurova, *Istoriya Buryatii*, 29; Arkhip I. Baldunnikov, "K voprosu o zadachakh istoriko-etnograficheskogo issledovaniya buryat," *Buryatiyevedeniye* 1–3 (5–7) (1928): 29; Caroline Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective: Economy, Society and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 25; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 86 and 91; Pavlinskaya, *Buryaty*, 84.

military skills and, when not thwarted by intra-tribal conflicts, they could set up great and well-organized combat troops.<sup>430</sup> Furthermore their traditional economy and lifestyle—a combination of nomadic livestock herding in the endless widths of the steppe and big-game hunting, often carried out as huge battues, i.e. communal hunts, called *zegete aba* in Buryat<sup>431</sup>—contributed essentially to their combat skills. They too, as any Mongols at any time, had excellent riding skills and their archery skills, including horseback archery, (again) heavily troubled the Russians, notwithstanding their advantage of possessing fire arms. Thus, more than this advantage in terms of weaponry it was most likely the lack of unity among the Buryat tribes that allowed the Russians, i.e. the Cossack squads, to subjugate them tribe by tribe. Nevertheless, to seize the territory of the Buryats—the steppe lands to the west and east of Lake Baikal—took the Russians almost three quarters of a century and required probably more effort than the conquest of all of Northern Siberia.

Most difficult for them was to seize Ara Mongolia, i.e.—for them—the ‘Cis-Baikal’ region. As described, the Buryat-Mongolian tribes there were those least affected by the inner-Mongolian turmoils and thus did comparatively well and had, as already stated, even subjugated the Evenks and other smaller groups in the region. When they realized that the Cossacks by no means had peaceful intentions, like, for instance, to set up (fair) trade relations,<sup>432</sup> but merely aimed to subjugate and exploit them, they set up fierce opposition. For a period of thirty years, from the late 1620s to the late 1650s, they fought the Cossacks. Notwithstanding their disadvantage in regard to weaponry, they frequently attacked and often annihilated both Cossack

---

<sup>430</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 87; Vadim Yu. Myasnikov and Vladimir D. Dugarov, *Voyennoye delo kochevnikov Baykal'skogo regiona v period srednevekov'ya* (Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2004), 109.

<sup>431</sup> These hunts indeed constituted an important economic and social institution of the Buryats since time immemorial. Some authors, first and foremost well known Buryat ethnographer Matvey Khangalov, even speak of an “epoch of communal hunts,” which, according to them, preceded the times Buryats became livestock breeders. See e.g. Dmitriy Klements and Matvey N. Khangalov, “Obshchestvennyye okhoty u severnykh buryat (Zegete aba—okhota na rosomakh),” in Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1 (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004 [1910]), 34–86, where Khangalov has coined the notion; Mikhail A. Kharitonov, “Traditsiya oblavnykh okhot v kul'ture buryat (K postanovke problem),” in *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 3, ed. Yefgeniy M. Yegorov et al. (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2001), 5–16; and Sesegma G. Zhambalova, “Oblavnaya okhota buryat kak otrazheniye ranney formy sotsial'noy organizatsii,” in *Buryaty*, ed. Lyubov L. Abayeva and Natal'ya L. Zhukovskaya (Moskva: Nauka, 2004), 62–73.

<sup>432</sup> The Buryats would have been keen on setting up such trade relations, as at that time trade with China had come to a complete standstill because of the turmoil of war in lying in-between Mongolia. Bakhayev and Shagdurova, *Istoriya Buryatii*, 35; Viktoriya V. Nomogoyeva, “Buryatiya v XVII–XVIII vekakh,” in *Istoriya Buryatii s drevneyshikh vremen do nachala XX veka*, ed. Yefrem Ye. Tarmakhanov (Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009), 75.

squads in battle and Cossack ostrogs, which they besieged and burned down to the ground.<sup>433</sup> In Northern Siberia, the Russians rarely had to face such a resistance. This is why their advance in the south was so delayed.

These “Buryat wars,” as British historian James Forsyth has named these events,<sup>434</sup> were fought with utmost brutality and claimed many victims on both sides, which is revealed in numerous documents—mainly reports of Cossack commanders—of that time.<sup>435</sup> Eventually these series of wars ended with the Cossacks’ victory in the late 1650s. This victory was, however, of the kind one must call a Pyrrhic victory. First, because many of the defeated, in particular large sections of the Ekhirit and Bulagat tribes, did not submit to the Cossacks but left their homelands and out-migrated into Mongolia, leaving behind large tracts of land devoid of humans for the ‘victorious’ conquerors,<sup>436</sup> thus without anybody from whom they could collect yasak. Second, because the region nonetheless was nowhere near to being pacified for a long time, because up to the end of the century violent uprisings, including actions like attacking and killing yasak collectors and even sieglements of ostrogs, remained anything but uncommon occurrences.<sup>437</sup> Only towards the very end of the seventeenth century did this come to an end and the Cossacks could finally establish their control over the Cis-Baikal region. By this time they benefited from a circumstance to which they themselves had not contributed at all: a considerable part of those Buryat tribes who earlier sought refuge in Mongolia returned to their homelands and submitted to the tsar, because in crisis-shaken Mongolia they had experienced even more severe hardships.<sup>438</sup>

This was due to three conflicts, which simultaneously culminated there at the end of the seventeenth century. In Khalkha-Mongolia, comprising the central and eastern parts of the Mongolian steppe lands and reaching northwards into the Trans-Baikal region, a whole slew of rivaling khans fought with each other. These feuds were fought with increasing fierceness as the Khalkha altogether got under increasing pressure from two sides concurrently. In the south the

---

<sup>433</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 89–91; Aleksey P. Okladnikov, *Ocherki iz istorii zapadnykh buryat-mongolov* (Leningrad: Sotselgiz, 1937), 395–96; Nomogoyeva, “Buryatiya v XVII–XVIII vekakh,” 75–76.

<sup>434</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 89.

<sup>435</sup> Pavlinskaya, *Buryaty*, 103–60.

<sup>436</sup> Johann Georg Gmelin, *Reise durch Sibirien von dem Jahr 1733 bis 1743, zweyter Theil* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1752), 186; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 92; Nomogoyeva, “Buryatiya v XVII–XVIII vekakh,” 76; Anatoliy N. Turunov, *Proshloye buryat-mongol’skoy narodnosti* (Irkutsk: 1922), 39.

<sup>437</sup> Okladnikov, *Ocherki*, 395–96; Yegorov, “Istoricheskoye znachenie,” 9.

<sup>438</sup> Nomogoyeva, “Buryatiya v XVII–XVIII vekakh,” 76.

Manchu-Chinese Qing Empire, which succeeded that of the Ming in 1644, reversed its predecessors' defensive non-intervention policy towards the steppe nomads into its contrary and carried out an aggressive policy of expansion into the steppe lands: Manchu troops attacked Khalkha tribes directly and intruded relentlessly ever further into the Mongolian steppe.<sup>439</sup> To complete their misery the Khalkha were, at exactly the same time, attacked more severely than ever from the west by their 'fellow'-Mongolian 'brothers,' i.e. their long-term enemies, the Oirat. Unlike the disunited Khalkha, the Oirat were united under Galdan Khan, who waged war against the Khalkha in 1673. This 'war of brothers' lasted for fifteen years and was carried out with no less brutality than any other war, perhaps even to the contrary. Fights were so atrocious that not only the Buryat tribes who escaped shortly before from the Cossacks but also Khalkha tribes in numerous flocks sought refuge in the Baikal region, willing to submit to the Russian tsar.<sup>440</sup> Towards the end of the 1680s things, seen from a Mongolian perspective, culminated in a tragic end. In 1688 Galdan defeated the Khalkha completely, whereupon they had no other choice than to flee to Inner Mongolia which was then already conquered by the Manchu and to submit to them. Only a few months later, in 1689, the Manchu with the help of their new subjects lured Galdan into a battle deep in Inner Mongolia, already close to Beijing, and defeated his troops there severely. Although Galdan personally was able to escape, he never again could pose any serious threat to the Manchu. They, for their part, immediately seized whole Khalkha-Mongolia and still in the same year, 1689, intruded with a fifteen thousand man strong army into the trans-Baikal steppes.

Thus both the Cis-Baikal and the Trans-Baikal regions were affected by the turmoil in Mongolia, but the tribes settling in the trans-Baikal steppes, due to a lack of protecting natural borders, suffered more. This helped the Russians, who started their conquest of the country beyond Lake Baikal in the late 1640s. In contrast to the cis-Baikal Buryats the *Khori* and *Tabunut*, which were the most numerous of the trans-Baikal Buryat tribes, did only partly and for much shorter periods of time put up military resistance against the Cossacks.<sup>441</sup> That first because before Galdan waged his war against the Khalkha, i.e. until the early 1670s, they could

---

<sup>439</sup> Garmazhap L. Sanzhiyev, "Prisoyedineniye Buryatii k rossiyskomu gosudarstvu i ego istoricheskoye znachenije," in *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 4, ed. V. M. Alekseyeva et al. (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2003), 28.

<sup>440</sup> Castrén, *Ethnologische Vorlesungen*, 42; Bair Taysayev, "Rossiya i Zabaykal'e ot XVII do XXI veka," *Pravda Buryatii*, no. 25 (2011): p. 8.

<sup>441</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 97.

often just yield to the Cossacks and move southwards. Second, because when the turmoil in Mongolia increased, this led also to an increase of the frequency of tribute collecting campaigns, i.e. of raids, by Khalkha khans, which many Buryat tribes brought to cooperate with the Cossacks in order to gain them over to become their brothers in arms against the Khalkha plaguers. Third, the inter-ethnic relations in Trans-Baikalia differed in one respect considerably from those on the other side of the lake: the *Evenk* tribes there were more numerous than their ethnic brothers in the Cis-Baikal region and were *not* subjugated to the Buryats. Furthermore, they conducted a similar to the Buryats way of life, because they were so called ‘Horse Tungus’, i.e. mounted stock breeding steppe nomads just as the Buryats and Mongols, thus equally strong and skilled in military terms. They, however, shared with the Buryats and Mongols also the propensity for dissension. Some of them took the *shert*, some did not. Those who did were then attacked by their ‘brothers,’ who carried out punitive raids to punish them for their ‘treason.’ This in turn brought the first to even closer cooperate with the Russians and to provide to them auxiliary troops.<sup>442</sup>

Taken together these circumstances allowed the Russians to advance much more quickly into new territories in the Trans-Baikal region than they were able to do in the Cis-Baikal region. Already in 1654, only six years after they had established their first trans-Baikalian *ostrog* in the Barguzin valley not far from the lake, they founded the ostrog of Nerchinsk more than five hundred miles further to the east. Notwithstanding this fast advance, not all of the Buryat and Evenk tribes submitted to the Cossacks, but only some. Especially the Tabunut who settled mainly in the southern part of Trans-Baikalia put up vehement resistance, which became even stronger in the 1670s and 1680s when they were joined by Khalkha refugees. When they together started to not only attack the Russian ostrogs but also raided the Evenk and Khorī,<sup>443</sup> they caused most of the latter to finally bow to the tsar and to fight together with the Cossacks against these raiders and besiegers. However, when, in the late 1680s the pressure of the Manchu-Chinese expansion increased also upon the Tabunut and their new allies, many of them could be persuaded by General Field Marshal Fëdor Alekseyevich Golovin, who in those years was the tsar’s military commander and chief administrator of the Trans-Baikal region, to also accept

---

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, 96; Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 25.

<sup>443</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 97–98.

Russian rule and concomitant protection.<sup>444</sup> Yet, shortly later, in 1689, when Golovin had to carry out direct negotiations with those from whom he had promised to protect the Tabunut, his negotiating skills did not help him much. In the treaty between the Russian Empire and the Qing Empire, which he signed on behalf of the tsar near the ostrog of Nerchinsk in which he and the about two thousand Cossacks and Khori cavalry men he had at his disposal were besieged by the fifteen-thousand-man strong Manchu army mentioned above, the Amur region, which to seize was the actual ultimate goal of Russia's efforts in Southern Siberia, was assigned to the Middle Kingdom. However, all tribes who by then had formally submitted to the Russian tsar, including the just shortly earlier arrived refugees from Khalkha-Mongolia, were assigned to the Russian Empire.<sup>445</sup> They considerably outnumbered the Buryat clans who had outmigrated to Khalkha-Mongolia. Thus, although in the treaty an actual borderline between the two empires was not determined for the trans-Baikal steppes but only for the Amur region further east,<sup>446</sup> this first treaty between Russia and China in history essentially also set up the division of these steppe lands between them. Since August 27<sup>th</sup> 1689, the day the treaty was signed, no major changes of this part of the agreement between the two super powers ever occurred! The pasture grounds of the subjects of the tsar became Russian territory,<sup>447</sup> those of the subjects of the Qing Emperor territory of his state. That way the Baikal region became a part of Russia and remained such up to the present day. It is true that at that time many of the Buryats were in favor of being or becoming subjects of the Tsar and actively supported this step and more than a few of them even became brothers in arms of the Cossacks. It is however equally true that to do so for many, if not most, of them was nothing more than a decision for the lesser of two evils. Khalkha raids coupled with Manchu military aggression had pushed them into the hands of the Russians.

Russia, however, did not become a secure haven for the Buryats either. The *voyevods* and *prikazchiks*, who were the military commanders of the ostrogs, yasak collectors, administrators, and judges all at once, frequently shamelessly abused their office and greedily and brutally squeezed out of their new tributary subjects as many as possible pelts or whatever other precious

---

<sup>444</sup> G. N. Ochirova, “‘Atsagatskaya letopis’ o poyezdke delegatsii khori-buryat v Moskvu v 1702–1703 gg.,” in *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 1, ed. Yefgeniy M. Yegorov et al. (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2001), 64.

<sup>445</sup> Turunov, *Proshloye buryat-mongol'skoy narodnosti*, 40.

<sup>446</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 108; Jurij N. Semjonow, *Sibirien, Schatzkammer des Ostens* (Wien: Econ, 1975), 136.

<sup>447</sup> Yegorov, “Istoricheskoye znachenie,” 15–16.

items they could get from them, and more to line their own pockets than to feed the treasury. They let their Cossacks take Buryat and Evenk women and children hostage and torture and mistreat them in order to extort from their kin the highest possible payments.<sup>448</sup> From such treatment not even those tribes were spared who earlier had supported the Cossacks. Thus, in 1695, a big uprising of the Buryats and Evenks in both Cis- and Trans-Baikalia against such practices broke out which was even supported by Russian farmers who had already arrived in the area and tilled the soil but were not treated much better than the *inorodtsy*—the “alien kind of people,” i.e. savages—as all the natives of Siberia were then called by the Russians. This insurrection lasted into the next year, 1696, and the insurgents even besieged the town of Irkutsk, but it was eventually crushed, as other, smaller uprisings were before and after.<sup>449</sup> As a result out-migrations of Buryat tribes into Khalkha-Mongolia, i.e. into the Qing Empire, occurred again. From there, however, tribes likewise escaped, which for their part sought refuge in Russia.<sup>450</sup>

To sum up, the Russian conquest of the Baikal region and subjugation of the Buryats was far from being a “voluntary entry” into Russia, as it has been unvaryingly repeated in Soviet historiography from the 1930s up to the end of the Soviet rule and became the official wording again as of the summer of 2011, when the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this “voluntary entry” was celebrated in the Republic of Buryatia. In fact, it was a violent venture that lasted seven decades and claimed unnumbered victims on both sides.

### *The Baikal region and the Buryats under Tsarist rule*

In addition to the voyevods and prikazchiks, the Russian farmers, following on the heels of the Cossacks, soon became a problem for the Buryats too, as they—under the protection of the Cossacks—deprived the Buryats of the best pasture lands for their farming needs. This made it even harder for the Buryats to bear the yasak burden imposed on them. Thus, around the turn of

---

<sup>448</sup> Bakhayev and Shagdurova, *Istoriya Buryatii*, 41–42; Nomogoyeva, “Buryatiya v XVII–XVIII vekakh,” 81; Vandan Yumsunov, “Istoriya proizkhozhdeniya odinnadsati khorinskikh rodov,” in *Buryatskie letopisi*, ed. Shirap B. Chimitdorzhiev and Tsymzhit P. Vanchikova (Buryatskiy institut obshchestvennykh nauk SO RAN: Ulan-Ude 1995), 76–77; Zhan A. Zimin, *Istoriya Alarskogo rayona* (Irkutsk 1995), 53.

<sup>449</sup> Bakhayev and Shagdurova, *Istoriya Buryatii*, 53–54; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 91; Nomogoyeva, “Buryatiya v XVII–XVIII vekakh,” 83.

<sup>450</sup> Bair Taysayev, “Rossiya i Zabaykal’e ot XVII do XXI veka,” *Pravda Buryatii*, no. 25 (2011): p. 8.



the eighteenth century, their living conditions had become unbearable to the point of threatening their existence. Moreover, caught in between those two overly powerful imperial aggressors, Russia and Manchu-China, this situation seemed to be a dead-end, as neither fighting these superpowers nor escaping from them was possible or would have made any sense. The Buryats, nonetheless, did find a way out.

At the onset of the eighteenth century, the eleven clans of the Khorï made a remarkable decision and carried out an impressive venture. After having realized that they would not be able to ameliorate their situation on the local level, because no flight was possible, no insurrection had a reasonable chance of success, and petitioning the local Russian authorities would also fail, the Khorï decided to turn directly to the sovereign, i.e. to “His Imperial Highness” Tsar Peter the Great. To make sure that he really got to know about their situation and what they demanded, they sent a large delegation to his court in Moscow with the objective of meeting with him in person. The delegation was led by the *saysan*—i.e. clan leader—Badan Turakin and set off from the trans-Baikal steppes in the fall of 1702. After several months of long winter travel on horseback, the fifty-two-member delegation arrived in Moscow in early February 1703.

Already on February 25<sup>th</sup>, Peter the Great received the delegation in the Kremlin under the protocols of an official state reception,<sup>451</sup> although most of the courtiers must have taken them to be just alien Mongolian backwoodsmen. It was very likely General Field Marshal Golovin, who made this reception happen, as it was precisely Turakin’s—that is, the delegation’s leader’s—cavalry men, who backed him fourteen years earlier in his difficult situation in Nerchinsk.<sup>452</sup> In the meantime, Golovin had become Peter’s minister of war, foreign minister, and the head of what would today be called the secret service.<sup>453</sup> He probably told “His Highness” that there was no one better than the Buryats from whom he could obtain reliable and detailed information about the situation in the frontier region with Manchu-China, one of the empire’s most dangerous enemies. Unlike the selfish and thus short-sighted voyevods in the region itself, Peter

---

<sup>451</sup> Ochirova, ““Atsagatskaya letopis’,” 64; V. Tsybikdorzhieva and D. Tsybikdorzhieva, “Gramota-ukaz Petra I i pravo buryat na svoi ‘porodnye’ zemli,” in *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 4, ed. V. M. Alekseyeva et al. (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2003), 39.

<sup>452</sup> S. Tsyrendorzhiev, “Nerchinskiy traktat,” *Ugay zam*, spetsissue no. 5, February 2003: p. 4.

<sup>453</sup> He directed the so-called *Posol’skiy prikaz*, the government’s agency that carried out both foreign policy and espionage. Vladimir G. Mitypov, “Taynaya chast’ khorinskoy missii (versiya),” in *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 4, ed. V. M. Alekseyeva et al. (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2003), 34.

listened carefully to what the Buryats—and also Golovin—had to tell him, and understood quickly that, in order to retain the possession of the strategically and economically vital Baikal region, Russia would need the loyalty of the Buryats. Consequently, less than one month later, on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, Peter issued an *ukaz*, a decree, in which he first guaranteed the Khoris possession of, not all, but large parts of their hereditary land, thus restricting the land-grabbing by Russian farmers. Second, he strictly outlawed any mistreatment by local governors, commanders, or tribute collectors, making this a punishable offense. Furthermore, to ensure that his instructions and regulations were observed and followed, he ordered special inspectors to be sent out from Moscow to Trans-Baikalia. He also ordered a restructuring of the local administration, assigning the Khoris-Buryats to an ostrog located closer to the center of their settlement than the one to which they were assigned before.<sup>454</sup> The wealth of detail about the region, the situation there, and the appropriateness of the measures stipulated in this decree are clearly due to the first-hand information the tsar received from the Buryat delegates as well as from his own informant and close confidant Golovin.<sup>455</sup> It was this decree, or, to be more precise, the actual enactment of its orders, which finally tied the Buryats firmly and permanently to the Russian Empire, because their situation and living conditions now improved considerably.

This *ukaz* of Tsar Peter the Great also constitutes the first actual administrative act of the Russian government pertaining to the Baikal region and its population.<sup>456</sup> It aimed to regulate the relations between the Buryat and the Russian population groups (land assignments) and between the Buryats and the state (yasak payment), but did not interfere with *inner*-Buryat relations and matters. This principle shall prevail for long periods of the Tsarist rule.<sup>457</sup> In the “Instructions for the Border Guards,” issued by Count Savva Lukich Vladislavich Raguzinskiy in 1728, the Buryat tribes were formally given the right to pay the yasak not with furs but with cattle, silk, or money, which was much easier for them, and to carry out the collection and delivery to the

---

<sup>454</sup> Shirap B. Chimitdorzhiev, *Khozheniye khoris-buryat k Sagan khanu (Belomu tsaryu): Ocherki po istorii i kul'ture khoris-buryat. Srednevekov'e i novoye vremya* (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 2001), 50.

<sup>455</sup> V. Tsybikdorzhiev, “Graf F. A. Golovin,” *Ugay zam*, spetsissue no. 5, February 2003: p. 4.

<sup>456</sup> Bazar B. Baradin, “Buryat-mongoly. Kratkiy istoricheskiy ocherk oformleniya buryat-mongol'skoy narodnosti,” *Buryatiyevedeniye* 3–4 (1927): 48.

<sup>457</sup> Nomogoyeva, “Buryatiya v XVII–XVIII vekakh,” 83.

treasury by themselves, as well as to administer justice in cases of minor offenses.<sup>458</sup> The instructions, however, also regulated in more detail the relations between the population groups in the Baikal region and even across the border, as the Buryats were prohibited to marry Khalkha-Mongols.<sup>459</sup>

The latter restriction reveals the early beginning of a long-term policy of the Tsarist government (and which was later continued and even boosted by the Soviet government as well). The assignment of 'their' Mongolian subjects to *their* empire (or union) had to be secured and everything that could endanger this, for instance, any kind of close relations with the Mongols on the Chinese side of the border, had to be prevented.

In the 1720s, however, this was not too difficult a task. Still strong were the memories of the frequent Khalkha raids and the horrors of the Manchu aggression the Buryat and Evenk tribes had suffered just one generation earlier, and the Manchu aggression was still ongoing in neighboring Khalkha-Mongolia.<sup>460</sup> Therefore, and also because of the satisfactory living conditions the mentioned efforts of the Tsarist government had created for them, most of the Buryat and Evenk tribes felt comfortable with their status as "*yasashnye inozemtsy*," which translates into English as something like "aliens who have to pay *yasak*," so that many of them voluntarily became the very border guards Count Raguzinskiy's instructions regarded. After he, one year earlier, in 1727, had signed on behalf of the tsar the Treaty of Burinsk in which Russia and Manchu-China finally dedicated the exact borderline between them, the *Sartuli*, who had relatively recently immigrated from Khalkha-Mongolia into southern Trans-Baikal, willingly and eagerly carried out the service as border guards.<sup>461</sup> Later, in 1764, the Selenga Buryats even applied to the Tsarist government to be allowed to form their own Cossack regiments. Their application was approved, and four, six-hundred-man-strong *Buryat* Cossack regiments were

---

<sup>458</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 168; Vladimir P. Girchenko, "Buryaty i tungusy v Pribaykal'ye," *Pribaykal'skiy kalendar' na 1922 g.* (1921): 101; Nomogoyeva, "Buryatiya v XVII–XVIII vekakh," 82.

<sup>459</sup> Vasilii V. Belikov, *Evenki Buryatii: Istoriya i sovremennost'* (Ulan-Ude: BNTs SO RAN, 1994), 21.

<sup>460</sup> For instance, when in the late 1720s (sources don't reveal the exact date) eight Khori clans, who had ended up on the Chinese side of the border after the turmoil of the seventeenth century, tried under the leadership of their prince Shilde Zangi to return to Russia, Manchu troops prevented them from doing so. The troops captured the prince and decapitated him in front of his people. Legend has it that his head was rolling towards Russia. Bair Taysayev, "Rossiya i Zabaykal'e ot XVII do XXI veka," *Pravda Buryatii*, no. 25 (2011): p. 8; Turunov, *Proshloye buryat-mongol'skoy narodnosti*, 40.

<sup>461</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 169.

formed, who, together with one *Evenk* Cossack regiment and only a few Russian military men, protected the border of the *Russian* Empire in Trans-Baikalia for nearly half a century. It was only in the first decades of the nineteenth century that a considerable number of *Russian* Cossacks were stationed in the region again.<sup>462</sup> Thus, Tsar Peter the Great's and General Field Marshal Golovin's master plan had worked out. They indeed had won over most of the Buryats for Russia.

This may appear astounding when looking at the massive immigration movements of Russian farmers into the region which continued despite Tsar Peter the Great's ukaz of 1703. The ukaz's stipulations had been enacted and indeed restricted the land-grabbing by those immigrants, but this regarded only certain territories, namely those of the Khorī, i.e. only parts of Trans-Baikalia and not at all the Cis-Baikal region. In addition, it was really effective only for a relatively short period of time. By the late 1760s, the situation again became similar to that of the time when the Khorī decided for the delegation, but this time a number of Buryat tribes reverted to the other methods of tackling Russian oppression, which their forefathers had utilised about a century earlier. After unsuccessfully *revolting* in 1767, they *escaped* in 1772 over the border into China and settled in the Barga region<sup>463</sup> where they joined the eight Khorī clans who had tried to cross the border in the other direction earlier in the century.<sup>464</sup> The descendants of both these Buryat groups still live there today.

At the same time, the land question was further aggravated by the order of Tsarina Catherine the Great to resettle the Old Believers from Poland to Trans-Baikalia. They arrived in three waves, in 1756, 1764, and 1767, and founded their villages mainly in the valleys of the right tributaries of the river Selenga, in other words on land which, according to Tsar Peter the Great's ukaz, belonged, by rights, to the Khorī.<sup>465</sup>

---

<sup>462</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 169; Girchenko, "Buryaty i tungusy v Pribaykal'ye," 103; Nomogoyeva, "Buryatiya v XVII–XVIII vekakh," 84.

<sup>463</sup> Castrén, *Ethnologische Vorlesungen*, 43; Walther Heissig, *Der mongolische Kulturwandel in den Hsingan-Provinzen Mandschukuos* (Wien: Exner, 1944), 5. Today the Barga region is part of the autonomous province Inner Mongolia of the People's Republic of China and borders Mongolia and Russia.

<sup>464</sup> See footnote 460.

<sup>465</sup> Erdyneyeva and Chernov, *Geografiya Buryatii*, 66; A. M. Leonov, "Kogda nachalos' massovoye pereseleniye staroobryadtsev v Zabaykal'ye?" in *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 2, ed. N. V. Kim (Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1991), 20. About the origination, history, and characteristics of the Old Believers see above, pp. 90–91.

Both further to the west and to the east, it was the common Russian farmers who ousted the Buryats from vast lands where they formerly had settled and pastured their livestock. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Russians had become the sole population group in the vicinity of the lower streams of the rivers Angara and Irkut, and also had become dominant in the upper Lena valley, as regards the Cis-Baikal region. In Trans-Baikalia, they became dominant in the valleys of the rivers Selenga, Uda, and Dzhida, and the sole population group in the valleys of the Shilka and the Ingoda.<sup>466</sup> Thus, the result was not only that the Buryats had lost considerable parts of their land, but also that their area of settlement had become non-contiguous, i.e. split “in four separate areas divided from each other by Russian settlement,”<sup>467</sup> a dismemberment remaining up to the present day.

A further significant increase in the immigration of Russians into Siberia brought along the abolition of serfdom by Tsar Alexander the Second in 1861.<sup>468</sup> Many of them made it to Siberia for finding their own pieces of farmland or, and even to a greater extent, as laborers. They first worked to construct and maintain the “Siberian Tract,” the (originally military and trade) road between Moscow and Kyakhta that was the hub of Russia’s China trade; later, towards the end of the century, they built the Trans-Siberian Railroad.<sup>469</sup> As a result, the Buryats had become a minority in their homelands by the beginning of the twentieth century. In the Cis-Baikal region, they were outnumbered by the Russians by five-fold and in Trans-Baikalia by three-fold.<sup>470</sup> Nonetheless, the tsars in Moscow as well as the Russian servants, farmers, merchants, and manufacturers in the Baikal region itself, could largely rely on the Buryats’ loyalty to Russia up to the turn of the twentieth century.

What were the reasons for this seemingly irrational commitment? The first reason was that there were others that the Buryats could grab land from. Those were the Evenks. As stated above, the Buryats outclassed the Evenks in military terms in the Cis-Baikal region. There the Buryats, whom the Russians ousted from their pasture lands on the lower streams of the Angara and the Irkut rivers, moved up the Irkut and expelled from there Evenk tribes, who hence had to

---

<sup>466</sup> Walter Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Praeger, 1954), 116.

<sup>467</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 176.

<sup>468</sup> Montgomery, *Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Nationality and Cultural Policy*, 19.

<sup>469</sup> Erdyneyeva and Chernov, *Geografiya Buryatii*, 66; Rimma Urchanova, “Die nationale Frage in Burjatien: gegenwärtige Retrospektive,” in *Nationalismus in den nationalen Gebietseinheiten*, vol. 3 of *Nationalismus im spät- und postkommunistischen Europa*, ed. Egbert Jahn (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008), 191.

<sup>470</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 173.

move into the forested Daban mountains. Similar processes took place on the upper stream of the Lena and also in Trans-Baikalia, where the Evenks were driven, not completely but to a considerable degree, out of the valleys of the rivers Barguzin, Uda, and Onon, respectively.<sup>471</sup>

In addition to this, a second important and, in regard to numbers, even more substantial demographic process concerning the Evenks and the Buryats took place. Starting in the seventeenth century and continuing through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Buryats assimilated significantly more Evenks than had spatially yielded to them. This process can be justly labeled as a mass assimilation, because while having been approximately equal to the Buryats in number in the seventeenth century the Evenks were outnumbered by them by almost five times at the end of the nineteenth century. This demographic development cannot be the result of only a natural population growth or decline. Especially, the growth of the Buryat population by more than eleven times, from around 25,000 in the seventeenth century<sup>472</sup> to 288,483 counted in the census of 1897,<sup>473</sup> can only be explained by this mass assimilation of Evenks.<sup>474</sup>

This astounding growth of the Buryat population during Tsarist times, and no matter what had caused it, points to one more reason for their overall satisfaction with their status as Russian subjects: although the described invasion of Russian immigrants and their land-grab surely exceeded by far the overall size of former Evenk land which had become Buryat land, there was obviously still enough left for everybody to make a living. It became, however, not enough for every *kind* of land use around the beginning of the twentieth century. I will come back to this further below.

The third, and surely equally essential, reason of the Buryats' commitment to Russia was that the Tsarist government's policies employed for them were for the most part, although not one of total *non*-interference, but surely one of *low*-interference with their internal tribal matters and traditional culture and life style. As already mentioned, the Buryat tribes were officially granted self-government, including tax collection and jurisdiction as early as 1728. The groundbreaking administrative reforms of Siberia, contrived by General-Governor Count Mikhail Mikhaylovich

---

<sup>471</sup> Sergey F. Ol'denburg and Sergey I. Rudenko, *Ob'yasnitel'naya zapiska k etnograficheskoy karte Sibiri* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1929), 65, 68–69.

<sup>472</sup> Dolgikh, "Nekotorye dannye k istorii obrazovaniya buryatskogo naroda," *Sovetskaya etnografiya* 1 (1953): 60.

<sup>473</sup> Ol'denburg and Rudenko, *Ob'yasnitel'naya zapiska k etnograficheskoy karte Sibiri*, 66–67.

<sup>474</sup> Daba D. Nimayev, "Kakova rol' tungusskikh plemen," 46–47.

Speranskiy with particular attention to its native population about a hundred years later, did not bring anything essentially new for the Buryats. Everything granted in the “*Ustav ob upravlenii inorodtsami v Sibiri*,” the “Decree on the natives’ self-governments in Siberia”—issued by Tsar Alexander the First following Speranskiy’s recommendations on July 22, 1822—either had been officially granted to the Buryats or had been practiced as unwritten rules long before. Thus, the decree only reconfirmed their exemption from military service (with the exception of the Cossacks among them) and from some taxes and their right of regulating by themselves their internal matters including the allotment of (pasture) land and the administration of justice in accordance with their customary law. Furthermore, the decree granted them their land rights, religious freedom, and the right of running their own schools,<sup>475</sup> but all of this, too, they had been entitled to already prior to this decree.

Regarding land rights, it was already Tsar Peter the Great who—as described above—granted the largest group of the Buryats, the Khori, land rights. With regard to religious freedom, it was Tsarina Elisabeth, who in 1741 as one of her first official acts as Empress, issued a decree in which she allowed 150 Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhist lamas to stay in Trans-Baikalia and to further propagate the Buddhist teaching and also that every Buryat tribe may have a *datsan*, a Buddhist monastery.

Concerning the Buryats’ religious affairs during Tsarist time, one can say the same as with regard to their economic and everyday life: although the subjugation under the Russians had a manifest impact, it was overall not as strong as one might expect. When the Russians arrived in the Baikal region around the midst of the seventeenth century, the Buryats were, with rare exceptions, shamanists. This, however, began to slowly change in the course of the second half of that century, when more Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhist lamas came to Trans-Baikalia and promulgated their creed. In the beginning, they had little success. Too deep-rooted were the shamanistic beliefs among the Buryats. But over time, they achieved success, after first applying methods like the burning of shamanic idols and, reportedly, even of shamans, but then by incorporating age-old shamanistic beliefs into Buddhism, thus creating a quite syncretistic belief

---

<sup>475</sup> Girchenko, “Buryaty i tungusy v Pribaykal’ye,” 104.

system.<sup>476</sup> In 1701, the first datsan of Buryatia was established. However, it consisted only of a small felt yurt.<sup>477</sup>

After the signing of the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689, the Tibetan and Mongolian clergymen were considered subjects of the neighboring enemy empire; therefore, they were increasingly mistrusted by the Russian authorities, but as the border had yet been neither exactly determined nor effectively guarded, they kept crossing it. This process peaked in 1712 when in Trans-Baikalia 150 lamas at once arrived who had to flee from the tribal wars in Khalkha-Mongolia.<sup>478</sup> With this great number of lamas, it was now possible to assign one lama to each of the clans of the Selenga and the Khorï Buryats, i.e. to all Buryats of Trans-Baikalia.<sup>479</sup> This led to the definitive breakthrough of Buddhism among the trans-Baikal Buryats. It was the pastoral system these lamas had created that Tsarina Elisabeth later approved in her decree, mentioned above.<sup>480</sup> Yet, at the same time, in the same decree, the empress also attempted to restrict Buddhist activities in her realm, as she limited the overall number of active lamas to, likewise, just 150. She, however, exempted them from all taxes and services.<sup>481</sup> Such contrariness shall become typical for the Tsarist government's handling of Buddhism among the Buryats. On the one hand, it granted the Buryats free practice of Buddhism, but on the other hand, it sedulously tried to control, restrict, and weaken the Buddhist faith, especially its clergy.

These attempts, were only partially successful. They worked out in regard to what can be called a top-down control mechanism. In 1764, the *shiretuy* (abbot) of the Tsongol datsan was appointed by the Irkutsk Gouvernement administration *bandido khambo lama*, "supreme lama"

---

<sup>476</sup> S. P. Baldayev, "Perezhitki shamanstva u buryat i mery bor'by s nimi," in *Voprosy preodeleniya perezhitkov proshlogo v bytu i soznanii lyudey i stanovleniya novykh obyayev, obryadov i traditsiy u narodov Sibiri*, ed. Ts. B. Budayev, Taras M. Mikhaylov, and K. V. Sydenov (Ulan-Ude: SO AN SSSR, 1966), 23–24; Caroline Humphrey, "Population Trends, Ethnicity and Religion among the Buryats," in *The Development of Siberia: People and Resources*, ed. Alan Wood (Basingstoke: Mac Millan, 1989), 167; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 171; Zhukovskaya, "Religion and Ethnicity," 26–27.

<sup>477</sup> John Snelling, *Buddhism in Russia. The Story of Agvan Dorzhiev, Lhasa's Emissary to the Tsar* (Shaftesbury: Element, 1993), 4.

<sup>478</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 170.

<sup>479</sup> Girchenko, "Buryaty i tungusy v Pribaykal'ye," 102

<sup>480</sup> Yumsunov, "Istoriya proiskhozhdeniya odinnadsati khorinskikh rodov," 43.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.; Montgomery, *Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Nationality and Cultural Policy*, 68; Dittmar Schorkowitz, "The Orthodox Church, Lamaism, and Shamanism among the Buriats and Kalmyks, 1825–1925," in *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 203.



of the Buryats. In 1767 Tsarina Catherine the Second approved this.<sup>482</sup> By this appointment the Russian authorities successfully created, as American historian Sharon Hundley has aptly put it, a “new religious position [...] a Buddhist leader and center of control that would be independent of Tibetan control, if not of Tibetan influence, one that was chosen, and could be removed by Russian authorities.”<sup>483</sup> The *khambo lamas*, as they are called in short by the Buryats, indeed acted and, as the implementation of this supreme leadership institution became permanent, still act today quite independently of Lhasa (or today Dharamsala). Although they were (and are) usually elected by an assembly of high-ranking lamas and Buryat laymen, the Tsarist (and later also the Soviet) government did occasionally use its authority to not appoint or to even withdraw a khambo lama.<sup>484</sup> However, the second major attempt of the Tsarist authorities to ‘tame’ the strong influence this alien, non-Orthodox, even non-Christian, religion had on the Buryats, failed. After Tsarina Elisabeth’s first attempt to restrict the number of lamas, several further orders and decrees with the same intention, and some also including restrictions of the number of datsans the Buryats were allowed to have, all failed by far, yet may even be labeled unworldly. For instance, the official regulations in force in the middle of the nineteenth century allowed first an overall number of 216 (two hundred and sixteen) lamas and later, by a decree of Tsar Nikolay the First, enacted in 1853, 218 (two hundred and eighteen), but in reality there were already more than 4,500 (four thousand five hundred) lamas active in 34 datsans by that time.<sup>485</sup> The figures continued to grow up to the end of the Tsarist period, when there were around 16,000 (sixteen thousand) lamas in 39 datsans.<sup>486</sup>

Attempts to convert Buryats to Russian Orthodoxy also mainly failed, as the Russian Orthodox Church seemed to be principally unable to carry out successful missionary work

---

<sup>482</sup> Girchenko, “Buryaty i tungusy v Pribaykal’ye,” 102; Yumsunov, “Istoriya proiskhozhdeniya odinnadtsati khorinskikh rodov,” 44.

<sup>483</sup> Hundley, “Defending the Periphery: Tsarist Management of Buriat Buddhism,” *The Russian Review* 69 (2010): 240.

<sup>484</sup> The introduction of this mechanism of direct state control of the Buddhist clergy was part of the Tsarist government’s general policy towards non-Orthodox faiths adopted under Catherine the Second. Although the conversion of the worshippers of those faiths to Russian Orthodoxy was still desired, the tsarina adopted a more tolerant approach towards the non-Orthodox religions, realizing their quality as moral institutions apt to maintain order among their followers, and that they, if tightly controlled, can be instrumentalized for the imperial government’s purposes. See Robert Crews, “Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” *The American Historical Review* 108, 1 (2003): 57–58.

<sup>485</sup> Montgomery, *Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Nationality and Cultural Policy*, 72–73; Snelling, *Buddhism in Russia*, 7.

<sup>486</sup> Montgomery, *Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Nationality and Cultural Policy*, 72.

among them. Bribery (of Buryat clan or tribe leaders) and force (especially forced baptisms)<sup>487</sup> were the missionary tactics and methods to which missionaries resorted practically solely to for about one and a half centuries. From the end of the seventeenth century, when missionary work among the Buryats was begun,<sup>488</sup> to the middle of the nineteenth century, only very limited success could be achieved by this, and only among the cis-Baikal Buryats. In Trans-Baikalia, the Orthodox priests fought a lost cause against the Buddhist lamas who, in contrast to them, spoke the language of the folks they wanted to convert to their creed.<sup>489</sup> Notwithstanding this, through this whole period of time, the church officials did not make much of an effort to train their priests in the Buryat language because they were persuaded that a true believer of the Gospel needs to listen to it in Russian. Only around the mid-nineteenth century did the Orthodox Church change its attitude and start to spread the Gospel in Buryat. In combination with various seductive practices, such as giving monetary presents to the newly baptized or even pardoning them for certain crimes, these new tactics led to some success in Cis-Baikalia, where in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, 41 mission stations and several dozens of mission schools were established.<sup>490</sup> In this way slightly over 40 percent of the cis-Baikal Buryats were converted to Russian Orthodoxy, according to the official figures of the census of 1897.<sup>491</sup> True believers among them were, however, not so many, as was revealed when flocks of the newly converted Buryats quickly left the Church after Tsar Nikolay the Second had granted religious freedom in the wake of the empire-wide revolts of 1905.<sup>492</sup> Furthermore, those who stayed in the Church most typically did not abandon their shamanistic beliefs and cults.<sup>493</sup> Thus, also among the cis-Baikal Buryats, a syncretistic religious practice emerged, as many of them put their trust in both the Christian God and the ancestor and protector spirits and attended

---

<sup>487</sup> Robert Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1964), 9; Khibi Vatanabe, *Obryady i politicheskaya integratsiya u buryat* (Tokio: 1994), 20–21.

<sup>488</sup> Mikhaylov, “Buryaty,” 122.

<sup>489</sup> Johann Georg Gmelin, *Reise durch Sibirien von dem Jahr 1733 bis 1743, erster Theil* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1751), 438; Zoya P. Morokhoyeva, *Lichnost' v kul'turakh vostoka i zapada: K postanovke problemy* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1994), 167; Zimin, *Istoriya Alarskogo rayona*, 51.

<sup>490</sup> Hundley, “Defending the Periphery,” 247; Mikhaylov, “Buryaty,” 122.

<sup>491</sup> Hundley, “Defending the Periphery,” 249.

<sup>492</sup> Natal'ya L. Zhukovskaya, “Na perekrestke trekh religii: Iz istorii dukhovnoy zhizni buryatskogo sela Tory,” in *Shamanizm i rannye religioznye predstavleniya*, ed. Dmitriy A. Funk (Moskva: Institut etnologii i antropologii RAN, 1995), 83.

<sup>493</sup> Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 30; Montgomery, *Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Nationality and Cultural Policy*, 72.

both the Holy Mass and shamans' rituals, a *mélange*, which shall become the prevalent custom among them up to the present day.

To sum up, after the turmoil of the wars of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century and the lawlessness of that early period of Russian rule ended, most of the Buryats on both sides of Lake Baikal were not exposed to a strong oppression, and neither their religious affairs nor their social life were very much disturbed by the Russians. Rather the opposite occurred: they took advantage of what the Russian, i.e. a western, essentially European, culture had to offer and also of the opportunities available as being part of a big empire. For instance, although arable farming—especially growing millet—was known and practiced by the Buryats, sometimes to considerable extent, before the Russians arrived, they adopted mainly Russian farming methods, which proved to be very suitable for the local natural conditions.<sup>494</sup> This is only one example of the Buryats' openness towards useful innovations and of their readiness for adaptations and alterations of their way of life. Most typically they were progressive, forward-looking people.

This attitude becomes particularly evident in regard to education. Although the Buryats had, with the Buddhist *datsans*, their own educational institutions, where not only the lamas were taught in Buddhist theology, philosophy, and Tibetan medicine and were engaged in science and arts, but which also run schools for ordinary boys and sometimes also for girls,<sup>495</sup> Buryat children also attended secular schools since the early nineteenth century.<sup>496</sup> First they attended separate Buryat schools, and then, since 1822, also Russian schools, when this was made possible by Speranskiy's reform.<sup>497</sup> Thus, the educational level of the Buryats was at least the same as that of the Russians, if not higher, as many of them certainly had a broader knowledge of languages, because bilingualism—Buryat and Russian—became widespread among them, and in addition they all also understood Khalkha-Mongolian and many even spoke it. The Buddhist lamas, on top of that, also knew Tibetan. Buddhism in general has hugely contributed to the educational level of the Buryats, as it constitutes not only a belief system but to at least the same extent also a philosophical and scientific system of thought. It was the Buddhist lamas who

---

<sup>494</sup> Baradin, "Buryat-mongoly," 48; Firs F. Bolonev, "Vzaimovliyanie kul'tury russkogo i aborigennogo naseleniya Vostochnoy Sibiri," *Izvestiya sibirskogo otdeleniya akademii nauk SSSR, Seriya istoriya, filologiya i filosofiya* 14, 3 (1985): 41; Mikhaylov, "Buryaty," 119.

<sup>495</sup> Mikhaylov, "Buryaty," 122; Snelling, *Buddhism in Russia*, 7.

<sup>496</sup> Irina N. Shagdurova and Yuriy B. Sandanov, "Buryatiya v XIX veke," in *Istoriya Buryatii s drevneyshikh vremen do nachala XX veka*, ed. Yefrem Ye. Tarmakhanov (Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009), 127.

<sup>497</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 173.

(re)introduced literacy among the Buryats, by applying the Classical Mongolian vertical script also for the Buryat language. Nevertheless also Russian education became, as we have seen, equally attractive to the Buryats. In 1846 in Kazan, the first Buryat graduated from a *Russian* university—Dorzhi Banzarov, who by then, although having been only 24 years old, was already one of the leading specialists in oriental studies of his time.<sup>498</sup> A whole row of famous Buryat scholars followed in his footsteps, and there were many Buryat doctors, high ranking Cossack commanders, teachers, civil servants, and others.<sup>499</sup>

Thus, what happened in the course of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century was that the Buryats, and especially those in Cis-Baikalia, but also many in Trans-Baikalia, gradually adopted more and more Russian customs, habits, and values: many tilled the soil in the Russian way, attended Russian schools, and had in general manifold close relations to Russians and Russian institutions; many Russian loanwords were incorporated into the Buryat language and Buryat parents started to give Russian names to their children, and the nomadic way of life was quit bit by bit in favor of a sedentary one. In short, a process of a gradual Russification took place. It is, however, important to state that this process occurred for the most part without any direct force on the part of the Russians, and that the core institutions of the Buryats' social and cultural life—social organization, exercise of religion(s), customary law—remained little affected by this process.

---

<sup>498</sup> His works have been repeatedly republished. The most recent republication of a compilation of his works as well as some of his letters, has been issued under the title of his most famous study, “Chernaya vera ili Shamanstvo u mongolov,” originally published in 1846 in *Uchenyye Zapiski Kazanskogo Universiteta*, kniga 3, 53–120, in Moscow in 2011: Dorzhi Banzarov, *Chernaya vera ili Shamanstvo u mongolov*, edited by G. N. Potanin, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Moskva: Knizhnyy dom “LIBROKOM”, 2011). An English translation of “Chernaya vera ili Shamanstvo u mongolov” has been published in 1980: Dorzhi Banzarov, “The Black Faith, or Shamanism Among the Mongols,” translated by Jan Nattier and John R. Krueger, *Mongolian Studies*, vol. VI (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980): 53–91.

<sup>499</sup> E.g. Galsan Gomboyev (1822–1863, professor at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Saint Petersburg), Afanasiy Shchapov (1831–1876), historian, ethnographer, and lecturer at the University of Kazan, Gombozhab Tsybikov (1873–1930, explorer, researcher, and the first western-trained scientist who visited Tibet), and Pëtr Badmayev (1851–1920, doctor of Tibetan medicine, personal physician of Tsar Alexander III and Tsar Nikolay II) to name only some of the most famous ones. See e.g. L. A. Zaytsev, “Kto, krome D. Banzarova, otnositsya k pervym deyatel'nyam prosveshcheniya, kul'tury i nauki iz buryat?” in *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 2, ed. N. V. Kim (Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1991), 38–39, and S. A. Maksanov, “Kakov byl uroven' kul'tury naseleniya Buryatii do Oktyabr'skoy Sotsialisticheskoy revolyutsii?” *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 2, ed. N. V. Kim (Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1991), 59–60.

This, however, changed in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, when the Buryats became victims of developments with which they actually had little to nothing to do with. The liberation of the villeins in 1861 was, of course, good for the villeins but was bad for the Buryats, because in the long run, it unleashed a new wave of Russian immigration into their land. The construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, started in 1892 and finished in 1905, was of course good for the economic progress of Russia, but for the Buryats probably had more bad than good ramifications, as it triggered, as already stated above, another huge immigration wave into their land.<sup>500</sup> It was only in this period of time, i.e. the last decades of the nineteenth and the first of the twentieth century, when the land shortage finally reached a degree that many Buryats were actually *forced* to give up their traditional nomadic life style, and hence to *involuntarily* fundamentally change their way of life.

This happened specifically because at the very end of the nineteenth century a “blow was struck at the traditional nomadic way of life of the Buryat cattle-rearers,” as James Forsyth has it,<sup>501</sup> because a reform of great detriment to the Buryats was enacted. To gain land for the masses of landless farmers in the European part of Russia, two laws, enacted in 1896 and 1900, determined all land in Siberia to be nationalized and then re-allotted. In the area to the west of Lake Baikal, this was done in equal shares of 15 *desyatins* (40.5 acres) of arable land and 3 *desyatins* (8.1 acres) of forest per adult person, regardless of whether the person was a settled tiller of the soil or a nomadic livestock breeder. In Trans-Baikalia, 30 *desyatins* (81 acres) were allotted to the Buryat nomads. Both amounts were much too small for further carrying out nomadic animal husbandry.<sup>502</sup>

In addition to this economic encroachment, both the attempts to strengthen autocratic rule and the nationalist (*Russian* nationalist of course) reflexes of the governments of the Tsars Alexander the Third (1881-1894) and Nikolay the Second (1894-1917) to the increasing economic, social and political dilemmas in their country led to their increasingly intolerant policies in regard to non-Russian population groups in general, and thus to the Buryats too. In a reversal of prior approaches, now a policy of deliberate Russification, including intensified

---

<sup>500</sup> Caroline Humphrey, “Buryats,” in *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union*, ed. Graham Smith, (London: Longman, 1990), 291.

<sup>501</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 172.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, 172; Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 27; *idem*, “Buryats,” 291; Shagdurova and Sandanov, “Buryatiya v nachale XX veke,” 133.

Russian Orthodox missionary work, and severe interference into all spheres of life won out. In regard to the Buryats, this process peaked in a step-by-step depletion of their self government rights, which was begun in 1885 and finalized 1901 to 1904. First rights, such as the exemption from military service and the independent administration of justice, were withdrawn from them,<sup>503</sup> and then their bodies of self-government, the so-called *steppe dumas*, introduced in 1822 as part of Speranskiy's reform of Siberia, were dissolved altogether and the Buryat *uluses*, i.e. their traditional dwelling units, were made subject of local Russian administrative units.<sup>504</sup> Against this action of the government, the Buryats fiercely, and in places even violently, rebelled. For three years, they refused to elect representatives for the administrative units they were now assigned to and more than once attacked Russian administrators and police officers who tried to enforce the law. In some places in Trans-Baikalia, eventually even the state of emergency had to be declared and army units sent into regions of Buryat settlement to suppress the upheavals. Thereafter many of the insurgents were arrested and exiled.<sup>505</sup> It was only through such violence that the deprivation of the Buryats of their self-government, which they had for 173 years, could finally be forced through and, although belated by three years, be put into effect by the Tsarist authorities in 1904.<sup>506</sup> More than a few Buryats, however, decided not to accept it and migrated to Mongolia, despite the not much better Manchu-Chinese rule there at that time.<sup>507</sup>

It is no wonder that these developments gave rise to the emergence of Buryat liberation and emancipation movements. They emerged during the uprising mentioned above and became organized in the course of the revolutionary year of 1905, when two large *suglany*, i.e. congregations, were held—one for the Trans-Baikal region, and one for the Cis-Baikal region. Their major demands were (1) to reestablish Buryat self-government, (2) to stop the land-grabbing from them, (3) to reestablish their independent jurisdiction, and (4) to permit the use of the (Buryat-)Mongolian language as the language of instruction in the schools. None of them, however, could be asserted, because, on the one hand, the autocratic Tsarist regime managed to

---

<sup>503</sup> Snelling, *Buddhism in Russia*, 3.

<sup>504</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 172; Girchenko, "Buryaty i tungusy v Pribaykal'ye," 105; Mikhaylov, "Buryaty," 120.

<sup>505</sup> Girchenko, "Buryaty i tungusy v Pribaykal'ye," 105; Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 8; F. A. Kudrjanzew and B. Ch. Chomchollow, "Geschichtlicher Abriss," part 5 of chapter "Burjat-Mongolische ASSR" in *Große Sowjet-Enzyklopädie: Reihe Länder der Erde*, vol. 19 (Berlin: Verlag Kultur und Fortschritt, 1955), 121; Shagdurova and Sandanov, "Buryatiya v nachale XX veka," 143.

<sup>506</sup> Shagdurova and Sandanov, "Buryatiya v nachale XX veka," 143.

<sup>507</sup> Musch, *Nomadismus und Sesshaftigkeit bei den Burjaten*, 12.

stay in power for another twelve years, during which it gave in very little to anybody, and, on the other hand, the Buryats could not form a united movement. They were split in essentially two groups—one more conservative, one more progressive. The major discordance was whether one should only aim at reestablishing the previous state—that is, the semi-autonomous self-government system of the steppe dumas—and living with Russian dominance as before, or whether more radical steps concerning both political reform and the protection of their national culture should be undertaken.<sup>508</sup>

As a consequence, diverse parts of the Buryat population made differing decisions: the Tunh-Sanaga clan, for instance, migrated between 1912 and 1916 to Mongolia,<sup>509</sup> which in 1911 had become autonomous from China—that is, could finally shake off the Manchu-Chinese yoke—which, in turn, augured the Tunh-Sanaga better living conditions than in autocratic-nationalistic (late-)Tsarist Russia.

In all of these early-twentieth century developments, as well as in the subsequent upheavals, one group of people among the Buryats played a crucial role, which emerged as an outcome of the high value the Buryats placed on both traditional Buddhist and western Russian education. As American historian Robert Rupen—author of seminal works about the Buryats’ modern history—states in concrete terms, this group emerged, because “concurrently with [an] emphasis on their Mongolian heritage, the Buriats wanted western learning. They aimed at universal education of their youth in both the Mongolian and Russian languages.”<sup>510</sup>

The result was that, by that crucial period of their history, a very well-educated class, generally referred to as the ‘Buryat *intelligentsia*,’ had developed among the Buryats.<sup>511</sup> Its most important and influential members were the orientalist and doctor of Tibetan medicine Pëtr Badmayev (1851–1919), the Buddhist lama and the thirteenth Dalai Lama’s teacher and ‘foreign minister’ Agvan Dorzhiyev (1853–1938), the Tibetologist and Mongolist Gombozhab Tsybikov (1873–1930), the translator and publicist Batu-dalay Ochirov (1875–1934), the historians

---

<sup>508</sup> “V kakoy stepeni buryaty prinyali uchastiye v pervoy rossiyskoy revolyutsii?” in *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 2, ed. N. V. Kim (Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1991), 118 (name of author not given); Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 33; Shagdurova and Sandanov, “Buryatiya v nachale XX veka,” 144–45.

<sup>509</sup> Sanders, *Historical Dictionary of Mongolia*, 30.

<sup>510</sup> Robert A. Rupen, “The Buriat Intelligentsia,” *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15, 3 (May 1956): 396.

<sup>511</sup> Baradin, “Buryat-mongoly,” 49; Melissa Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia: Transformation in Buryatia* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 17–18.

Mikhail Bogdanov (1878–1919) and Bazar Baradin (1878–1937), the folklorist and sedulous collector of Buryat lore Tsyben Zhamtsarano (1880–1940?),<sup>512</sup> the philologist—but mainly political activist—El'bekdorzhi Rinchino (ca. 1885–1937), and the poet Solbone Tuya<sup>513</sup> (1892–1937). Rupen concisely characterizes these intellectual leaders as follows:

Some facts are common to the lives of all of these men: their early years were spent in a typical Mongolian setting; the folklore and superstitions of their people were known to them, and even shared by them; they had excellent educations, most of them at the University of St. Petersburg, where they cooperated closely with leading Russian orientalists; they wrote scholarly (historical and philological) works in the Russian language; they all spoke and wrote Russian fluently. They traveled widely in Siberia, Central Asia, and European Russia, and some of them even in Western Europe. Yet they always remained Mongols, with close ties to their native land.<sup>514</sup>

The turmoil of the time, however, and in particular the manifold repressive measures of the (late-)Tsarist regime, forced all of them to take frequent part in activities other than the scholarly and artistic:

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Buriat steppes seethed with unprecedented political activity, led by the intelligentsia. In meeting after meeting, the Buriats condemned the Czarist Government for changing the traditional forms of land ownership, and for giving Buriat land to Russian settlers. Riding on the back of the fundamental issue of land came a host of other issues: nomadic existence, clan and tribal organization, russification, self-government, the judicial system, military service, education, language, representation in a national Russian elective assembly, religion, socialism, universal suffrage, and women's rights.<sup>515</sup>

---

<sup>512</sup> His year of death is unknown because he “was arrested in Leningrad in 1937 and was never heard from again.” Rupen, “The Buriat Intelligentsia,” 397.

<sup>513</sup> This is the pseudonym he used, meaning “Venusray” (Buryat: солбоной туя—*solbonoy tuya*). His real name was Pëtr Nikiforovich Dambinov.

<sup>514</sup> Rupen, “The Buriat Intelligentsia,” 384.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid., 387. Traditionally the Buryats did not recognize private land ownership. The land belonged to the clans. See e.g. Peter Kropotkin, *Gegenseitige Hilfe in der Entwicklung* (Leipzig: Thomas, 1904), 142.



This process peaked in 1917. The baneful effects of World War One—for instance, all nineteen to thirty-three-year-old male Buryats were drafted for rear services, a fourth of whom perished<sup>516</sup>—and the political events of that year triggered action. Immediately after the ousting of the tsar, “[f]rom March 1917 onward many Buryat conferences took place in Irkutsk, Verkhneudinsk and Chita, culminating in an All-Buryat Congress in April.”<sup>517</sup> The demands which the delegates—led by the members of the ‘intelligentsia’—made there were, however, the same as had been made twelve years earlier at the two suglany of 1905, which had been dominated by mostly the same intellectuals. The congress demanded again autonomy, self-administration, schooling in the Buryat-Mongolian language, and land reform.<sup>518</sup>

That again only such relatively moderate demands were made, although within the short period of political freedom in Russia between the February and October Revolutions of 1917 more would have been possible, had several interlinked reasons. First, the Buryats, and both the intellectuals and the ordinary people, were still divided in regard to the principal political direction they wanted to move: the conservatives aimed just at gradual improvements of what had been the status quo under the Tsarist regime; the liberals aimed for more radical changes like the creation of a “single, continuous territory, under the administration of a Buryat National Duma,” and “a complete system of education in the native language.”<sup>519</sup> In part, these two different approaches matched with the second basic dividing line running through the Buryat population as a whole. This was the discordance between the western (i.e. cis-Baikalian) and the eastern (i.e. trans-Baikalian) Buryats. The former tended to be more pro-Russian, the latter more pro-Mongolian. Fundamentally they disagreed about the role Buddhism should play in their society, with the eastern Buryats much in favor of a Buddhist leadership and the western Buryats strongly opposed.<sup>520</sup>

It was only the heavy Russian oppression, the “direct attack on the whole Buryat social structure and landholding pattern,” as Rupem concisely and aptly describes the late-Tsarist government’s policies,<sup>521</sup> which forced and bound the different Buryat groups together. They

---

<sup>516</sup> Baradin, “Buryat-mongoly,” 50.

<sup>517</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 271.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> Rupem, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 36, 111.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 105.

understood that to succeed in anything they needed to act united, thus needed to find and agree on compromises.

The third reason for making only relatively moderate demands was that all the Buryat leaders had, as described above, a Russian education and had made careers in Russian institutions or were at least closely working with them, and were thus not seeking a complete upheaval of the conditions of their lives. As a consequence, they opposed both separatism—instead of which they just demanded better minority rights<sup>522</sup>—and “socialist revolution and Soviets in Siberia”—instead of which they called “for ‘bourgeois autonomy’.”<sup>523</sup>

Therefore, most of the Buryats who engaged in the Russian Civil War, which followed World War One and the October Revolution, did so on part of the ‘Whites,’ that is, the anti-Soviet forces.<sup>524</sup> For instance, 1800 Buryat cavalry men joined Ataman Semënov’s Cossack army, which, during that war, at times controlled the Trans-Baikal region.<sup>525</sup> Also the notorious ‘mad baron’ Roman von Ungern-Sternberg and the Cossack commander Tapkhayev had Buryats among their men.<sup>526</sup> There were, however, also some Buryats who joined the ‘Reds.’ For instance, some fought in the partisan corps of the anarcho-bolshevik Pavel Baltakhinov, which was active in the Cis-Baikal region;<sup>527</sup> and Mariya Sakh’yanova—the first female Buryat Bolshevik—and Tsyrempil Ranzhurov were two leading Buryat members of the local Bolshevik party organization.<sup>528</sup> Thus, Buryats fought on both sides, that is, against each other. The vast majority of the Buryats, however, followed their intellectual leaders, who did not support any side in this war, and tried to stay neutral and to not take part at all.<sup>529</sup>

---

<sup>522</sup> Rupen, “The Buriat Intelligentsia,” 385.

<sup>523</sup> Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 132. See also Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 31.

<sup>524</sup> Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, 119; Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 130; T. Ye. Sanzhiyeva, “Ustanovleniye Sovetskoy vlasti v Buryatii,” chapter 1 in *Istoriya Buryatii s nachala XX do nachala XXI veka*, ed. Yefrem Ye. Tarmakhanov (Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009), 14, 16.

<sup>525</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 271.

<sup>526</sup> Sergey Basayev, “Mikhey Yerbanov—palach Kolchaka i zhertva Choybalsana,” part 3, *Novaya Buryatiya*, June 27, 2011: p. 15.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 134; B. B. Batuyev, “Rasskazhite o zhizni i deyatel’nosti M. M. Sakh’yanovoy v Buryatii,” in *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 2, ed. N. V. Kim (Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1991), 101–8; D. V. Ulymzhiyev, “Rasskazhite o pervom buryatskom revolyutsionere Ts. Ts. Ranzhurove,” in *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 2, ed. N. V. Kim (Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1991), 120–22.

<sup>529</sup> Sergey Basayev, “Mikhey Yerbanov—palach Kolchaka i zhertva Choybalsana,” part 3, *Novaya Buryatiya*, June 27, 2011: p. 15.

Nonetheless, the whole population of the Baikal region—that is Russians and Buryats alike—was badly affected by the Russian *Civil War*, because it was this region where that war became a sizable *international* conflict. First, because the anti-Soviet powers—in the first place Japan, the U.S., and Great Britain, but also others—chose this region for their military intervention, because, if captured, half of Siberia would have become cut off from Soviet Russia.<sup>530</sup> Second, many of the tens of thousands of the prisoners of war from Germany and Austria-Hungary, who, until the outbreak of the Civil War, still had been kept in camps in Siberia in half-free, half-confined regimes, took part in the conflict too, and on both sides. Rupen rightly describes the emerged situation as “a fantastic kaleidoscope:”

Japanese; Americans; Czech, Hungarian, Serbian, Austrian, and German prisoners of war; Chinese; the International Red Cross; and all the Russians—Whites, Reds, Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, Kadets, Left Social Revolutionaries, Right Social Revolutionaries—these and many others more or less briefly crossed the territory inhabited by Buryat Mongols.<sup>531</sup>

First, in 1918 and 1919, with the help of the interventionists, the ‘Whites’ were more successful and controlled most of the Baikal region, but after they split into two rivaling parties—one led by Admiral Kolchak, the other by the Cossack Ataman Semënov—the ‘Reds’ could finally overcome them. In January of 1920, the Red Army (re)captured Irkutsk. Then in March, together with partisans, they took Verkhneudinsk, and in October of the same year they expelled Semënov from Chita and thus from Buryat territory altogether.<sup>532</sup>

As stated, most of the Buryats tried to avoid any involvement in this conflict. In many cases they could do so only by fleeing over the border to Mongolia or China. Tens of thousands of Buryats that way escaped the violence.<sup>533</sup> Although both conflicting parties exerted terror, the ‘white terror’ outweighed the ‘red’ one, because of Semënov’s particularly brutish reign in the

---

<sup>530</sup> Kudrjawzew and Chomchelow, “Geschichtlicher Abriss,” 124; Sanzhiyeva, “Ustanovleniye Sovetskoy vlasti v Buryatii,” 11.

<sup>531</sup> Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 129.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 136; Sanzhiyeva, “Ustanovleniye Sovetskoy vlasti v Buryatii,” 18, 20; idem, “Obrazovaniye Buryat-Mongol’skoy avtonomnoy sovetskoy sotsialisticheskoy respubliki. Vosstanovleniye narodnogo khozyaystva v usloviyakh NEP,” chapter 2 in *Istoriya Buryatii s nachala XX do nachala XXI veka*, ed. Yefrem Ye. Tarmakhanov (Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009), 22.

<sup>533</sup> Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 136; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 273; Musch, *Nomadismus und Sesshaftigkeit bei den Burjaten*, 12; Melissa Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 46, 50.

area his army controlled.<sup>534</sup> To give just one example, Semënov captured the aforementioned Buryat scholar Mikhail Bogdanov just because he had led 2000 Buryats to Manchuria, China, in order to escape the violence of the war. Semënov had him shot and his body burned in the boiler of a locomotive.<sup>535</sup> Therefore, although they had to say good bye to some political desires which had been widespread among them—in particular pan-Mongolist dreams of a resurrection of a Greater Mongolia and Buddhist, theocratic state conceptions<sup>536</sup>—most Buryats, including the members of the intelligentsia, were simply happy when the war was finally over and cooperated with the Soviets, now firmly in power. Many of those who had fled over the border also came back.<sup>537</sup>

### ***The Soviet period (1921 – 1991)***

That the majority of those Buryats, who had fled from the horrors of the Civil War to China or Mongolia, returned to what was now Soviet Russia had one main reason. For about a decade, from 1921 onward, the political developments in the Baikal region offered them better living conditions than anywhere else, because there, in that period of time, most of the Buryats' long-standing demands were indeed fulfilled.

In eastern Trans-Baikalia, a “Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Province”, consisting of most of the areas there with considerable Buryat population, was established in April 1921. For western Trans-Baikalia and Cis-Baikalia, this was first opposed by the (Russian dominated) Irkutsk committee of the Communist Party, but by order from Moscow—i.e. from Stalin, the people's commissar for nationalities questions—a “Mongol-Buryat Autonomous Province” was established there in January 1922. Less than one-and-a-half years later, on May 30, 1923, these

---

<sup>534</sup> Sanzhiyeva, “Ustanovleniye Sovetskoy vlasti v Buryatii,” 14; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 50–51.

<sup>535</sup> Rupen, “The Buriat Intelligentsia,” 386; B. B. Batuyev, ed., *Natsional'noye dvizheniye v Buryatii v 1917–1919 gg* (Ulan-Ude: Sibir', 1994), 194–95; N. N. Koz'min, “Mikhail Nikolayevich Bogdanov,” in Mikhail N. Bogdanov, *Ocherki istorii buryat-mongol'skogo naroda*, ed. N. N. Koz'min (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2014), 255.

<sup>536</sup> Humphrey, “Buryats,” 292; Alexander I. Andreyev, “Dreams of a Pan-Mongolian state: Sandan Tsydenov, Baron Ungern, Agvan Dorjiev, Nicholas Roerich” (<http://www.budcon.com/index.php/2013-03-14-08-21-28/2013-03-15-11-39-50/articles/78-dreams-of-a-pan-mongolian-state-sandan-tsydenov-baron-ungern-agvan-dorjiev-nicholas-roerich-by-alexander-i-andreyev>, accessed March 27, 2015).

<sup>537</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 273.

two autonomous provinces were merged into the “Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic” (BMASSR). It consisted of what are today the Republic of Buryatia and the Aga and Ust’-Orda Buryat Regions and also some other areas with considerable Buryat population. It had an area of about 160,000 square miles (almost the size of California), and it almost completely surrounded Lake Baikal. However, it did not consist of one contiguous territory, because two parts—the Aga Region in the east and the Alar District in the west—were separated from the main part by areas mainly populated with Russians and assigned to the Irkutsk and Chita Provinces of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, respectively.<sup>538</sup> Also the population of this new republic did not overwhelmingly consist of Buryats, as they made up only about half of it.<sup>539</sup>

In ‘their’ republic, it was nonetheless the Buryats who were “running their own show.”<sup>540</sup> From the beginning and until 1937, both the Republic’s government and its Communist Party committee were headed by Buryats, and also for practically all other key positions, as well as positions on the lower and local administrative levels, one tried wherever one could to replace Russians with (young and educated) Buryats.<sup>541</sup> This policy of *korenizatsiya*—“indigenization”—was not unique to the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR, but the general and official nationalities policy of the Soviet Union in its early years, designed for winning over the members of the many non-Russian nations of the former Tsarist empire. In the Buryat case, it led, in a sense, to the long-demanded reintroduction of their self-government.

Another important part of *korenizatsiya* was the fostering of education for the youth of all nations of the Soviet Union in *their* languages.<sup>542</sup> Among the Buryats, due to the high value education had for them, this worked out especially well, as, for example, one report for the school year of 1932–33 shows:

---

<sup>538</sup> Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, 116–17; Kudrijawzew and Chomchollow, “Geschichtlicher Abriss,” 129; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 274–75; Yelayev, *Buryatskiy narod*, 180; Sanzhiyeva, “Obrazovaniye Buryat-Mongol’skoy avtonomnoy sovetsskoy sotsialisticheskoy respubliki,” 22–26; Sergey Basayev, “Mikhey Yerbanov—palach Kolchaka i zhertva Choybalsana,” part 3, *Novaya Buryatiya*, June 27, 2011: p. 15.

<sup>539</sup> The percentages given vary from author to author. For instance, Forsyth writes that 43.8 percent of the republic’s population was Buryat, Yelayev states that it was 49 percent, and Basayev has 56.3 percent for it.

<sup>540</sup> Owen Lattimore, “Minorities in the Soviet Far East,” *Far Eastern Survey* 13, 17 (1944): 157.

<sup>541</sup> M. Klemm, “Beitrag zur Volkskunde der Burjato-Mongolei,” *Baessler Archiv: Beiträge zur Völkerkunde* 18, 3 (1935): 119; Sanzhiyeva, “Obrazovaniye Buryat-Mongol’skoy avtonomnoy sovetsskoy sotsialisticheskoy respubliki,” 28.

<sup>542</sup> Lattimore, “Minorities in the Soviet Far East,” 157.

*Buryat-Mongolia*, on the eve of the October Revolution, had only 48 schools, but in 1932–33 it had already 700, including 319 national schools. Before the Revolution, there were 1,000 pupils; in 1932–33 they numbered 67,000, including 27,000 Buryat-Mongols. 92 per cent of the children of the whole Republic had been admitted to the schools. Compared to the preceding year, the number of schools in the current school year increased by 8 per cent, and the number of national Buryat schools by 11 per cent. The number of pupils in the whole Republic has grown by 33 per cent, and for Buryat schools by 45 per cent. Thus, *the national school in the Republic developed faster than the Russian school*. [...] In all national schools, the teaching is in the native tongue and in the Latin script.<sup>543</sup>

Thus, in addition to the creation of an, albeit not contiguous, but still “single territory, under the administration of a Buryat National Duma” (in the form of the local party committee), also the Buryat liberation and emancipation movement’s second fundamental demand for “a complete system of education in the native language” became reality. School books in the Buryat language were printed for all subjects.<sup>544</sup>

However, the last statement in the above quote that in the school year of 1932–33 the teaching was in the *Latin* script (and thus the books too) points to one of the flip sides this form of cultural emancipation controlled by the Communist Party—i.e. by Moscow—had. For centuries the Classical Mongolian script had served for all Mongolian languages, thus had been a means of communication for and between all Mongolian peoples. Yet, this was exactly what Moscow did not like. Because of their fear of pan-Mongolian tendencies, the Soviet leaders (like the tsars) fought the close ties between ‘their’ Mongols and those beyond the borders of their realm. Thus, under the pretext of creating a script more suitable for the Buryat-Mongolian dialects and against the opinion of prominent Buryat scholars, e.g. the aforementioned Bazar Baradin and Gombozhab Tsybikov, which was initially even shared by the local party secretary Mikhey Yerbanov, a Latin script was introduced for the Buryat-Mongolian language in 1931. In 1939 this script was replaced by a Cyrillic one—precisely the Russian script plus three additional

---

<sup>543</sup> M. Nadezhdin and M. Solomonov, “The *Korenizatsiya* of the National School: Results of the Investigation of the National School,” in *The Nationalities Problem and Soviet Administration: Selected Readings on the Development of Soviet Nationalities Policies*, ed. Rudolf Schlesinger, trans. W. W. Gottlieb (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), 204. See also Klemm, “Beitrag zur Volkskunde der Burjato-Mongolei,” 129.

<sup>544</sup> Kudrjanzew and Chomcholow, “Geschichtlicher Abriss,” 157.

letters for the phonemes of the Khori dialect, which was now made the basis of the Buryat-Mongolian literary language. The choice of the Khori dialect was a further measure taken to make this language as distant as possible from other Mongolian languages—especially from Khalkha-Mongolian, predominantly spoken in Mongolia. Until then the basis of the literary Buryat-Mongolian language had been the dialect of the Selenga Buryats, which is close to Khalkha-Mongolian. The Khori dialect, by contrast, is very different from it.<sup>545</sup> All these forced reforms, enacted against the will and the needs of its speakers, did great harm to the Buryat-Mongolian language, and are a major reason for its subsequent decline to the status of a “severely endangered” language that it has today.<sup>546</sup>

With regard to the Buryats’ religious life, the first years of Soviet power in Buryatia were hallmarked by a pronouncedly liberal and tolerant policy of the Soviet authorities, especially toward Buddhism, despite “the first anti-religious campaign was already well under way in European Russia by then.”<sup>547</sup> One reason for this was the “Soviet regime’s [...] awareness of the need to tread cautiously in an alien land where anti-Russian feelings ran high and the Communist Party’s organs of governance and state coercion were not yet fully established.”<sup>548</sup> The other reason was that a part of the Buddhist clergy in fact sympathized with socialist ideas and viewed Buddhism as akin with Bolshevism, as both want to help ‘the toiling masses’ and as Buddhism is not opposed to modern science either. Therefore these Buddhists even viewed Buddha as a progenitor of Marx. The leader of this group was aforementioned Agvan Dorzhiyev, who once had even met with Lenin.<sup>549</sup> Thus, in this period, the Communist government of the BMASSR

---

<sup>545</sup> Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 246; Humphrey, “Buryats,” 293; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 331, 335; B. Vasil’yev, “Sberegi yazyk, togda sberezhem narod,” *Buryatiya*, July 2, 1997: p. 7; Shirap B. Chimitdorzhiev, *Buryat-mongoly: istoriya i sovremennost’* (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2001), 68–75; Olaf Leisse and Uta-Kristin Leisse, “A Siberian Challenge: Dealing with Multiethnicity in the Republic of Buryatia,” *Nationalities Papers* 35, 4 (2007): 778; Sergey Basayev, “Mikhey Yerbanov—palach Kolchaka i zhertva Choybalsana,” part 3, *Novaya Buryatiya*, June 27, 2011: p. 15.

<sup>546</sup> In the *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* is differentiated between Buryat in Cis-Baikalia, which is given the status of “severely endangered,” and Buryat in Trans-Baikalia, which is given the slightly better status of “definitely endangered.” *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (<http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/>, accessed March 31, 2015).

<sup>547</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 276.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid.

<sup>549</sup> Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, 117–18; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 330; Sanzhiyeva, “Obrazovaniye Buryat-Mongol’skoy avtonomnoy sovetsoy sotsialisticheskoy respubliki,” 28; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 57–58. These group’s views were anything but queer or exceptional. For example, the present Dalai Lama has stated that “the failure of the regime in the former Soviet Union was, for



not only tolerated but even closely cooperated with the Buddhist clergy. For example, the republic's commissariat for education ordered to translate Tibetan medical books by which Buryat lamas had been treating their patients for centuries.<sup>550</sup>

Shortly later, however, there was a volte-face. Starting in 1928, at first zealots of a "League of Militant Godless," then the Komsomol, the Communist Party's youth organization, and ultimately the state authorities themselves carried out attacks on lamas as well as on shamans, Russian-Orthodox priests and on lay believers too. They disturbed ceremonies, confiscated and/or destroyed devotional objects, and, from 1929 onward, whole temples and churches. Thousands of Buddhist lamas, many shamans and Russian-Orthodox priests were purged, that is, either shot dead on the spot or sent to gulags from which hardly anybody ever returned. Only a few could manage to escape the purges by fleeing to China or Mongolia. By the end of the 1930s all of the more than 40 Buddhist *datsans* that had existed were closed and, with the exception of just three, burned down or otherwise destroyed.<sup>551</sup> Only after World War Two, when the Soviet Union wanted to establish diplomatic relations with Southeast Asian countries—who, however, would only agree if the Soviets stop the oppression of Buddhism in their country—two *datsans* with a handful of lamas under the tight control of the KGB, were established: a previously closed one in the Aga Region and a new one in Ivolginsk, not far from the Republic's capital Ulan-Ude. Their activities were highly restricted and to attend ceremonies or just visit these *datsans* was highly discouraged.<sup>552</sup> Thus, the Buryats could not openly practice Buddhism for more than half a century, as this sad status of the formerly among them dominant cultural and religious institution persisted until the end of the Soviet Union. In the same way the Russian-Orthodox

---

me, not a failure of Marxism but the failure of totalitarianism. For this reason I still think of myself as half-Marxist, half-Buddhist." Quoted in Kevin M. Brien, "Buddhism and Marxism: Ironical Affinities," *Dialogue and Universalism* 14, 1–2 (2004): 38. Brien's article provides a good overview and sound analysis of the similarities of these two ideologies.

<sup>550</sup> Klemm, "Beitrag zur Volkskunde der Burjato-Mongolei," 116.

<sup>551</sup> For details about this repression of Buddhism and the persecutions of the lamas see e.g. Viktoriya V. Nomogoyeva, "Iz istorii bor'by s religiyey v Buryatii v 1920–1939-e gg.," in *Tezisi i doklady Mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-teoreticheskoy konferentsii "Banzarovskiy chteniya 2" posvyashchennoy 175-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya Dorzhi Banzarova*, ed. B. V. Banzarov, L. V. Kuras and V. Ts. Naydakov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs, 1997), 79–81, and A. A. Danzanova, "Buddizm v Buryatii v 1920–30-e gody," (ibid), 90–93.

<sup>552</sup> Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, 118; Mikhaylov, "Buryaty," 122; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 330–31; Zhukovskaya, "Religion and Ethnicity," 27–28; Jessica Jacobson, "Descendants of the Swan," *Russian Life*, November/December 2003: p. 60; Leisse and Leisse, "A Siberian Challenge," 779; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 73–75.



church was also oppressed. Only shamanism, which always has mainly been practiced discretely, could withstand the Soviet oppression slightly better, but suffered greatly too.<sup>553</sup>

As regards the economy, the sequence of developments was the same. Albeit the now Buryat dominated government also did not take any measures to return pasture lands to Buryat livestock breeders, at least the ‘New Economic Policy’, implemented by the Soviet leaders in 1921 (i.e. in Buryatia from the beginning of their rule) worked to overcome the disastrous economic effects of the two consecutive wars. The permission of private enterprise, including land lease and employment of wageworkers, facilitated a slow but steady recovery of the economy. This policy enabled in particular the region’s cattle rearers—most of them Buryats—to steadily increase the number of livestock and reaching its pre-war level in 1928, which improved the living conditions for many. Whereas some areas of the Republic were even famine-stricken in the early 1920s, a rural middle class had developed by the end of this decade.<sup>554</sup> In the following three years, from 1929 to 1932, it was however destroyed—in the brutal literal sense of the word—as was the livestock.

In those years the inglorious collectivization of agriculture in the Soviet Union was also pushed through in Buryatia, and—like almost everywhere in the country—by means of sheer terror. Thousands of Buryats who opposed the campaign<sup>555</sup> were executed, many more imprisoned, while an unknown but surely great number of them fled to Mongolia or China. In addition to the confiscation of their livestock, the, by a majority (at least in Trans-Baikalia), still nomadic Buryats were also forced into permanent settlement by this campaign. Thus, they “were faced with the inescapable destruction of their whole way of life,” as Forsyth aptly describes this tragedy, and therefore “took the only retaliatory measure available to them—mass slaughter of their own livestock.”<sup>556</sup> According to official statistics, the number of livestock in the republic was down by 62.5 percent in 1932 in comparison with 1929. Most likely the loss was in fact even greater. Nonetheless, all Buryats were settled and made members of *kolkhozes*—collective

---

<sup>553</sup> Humphrey, “Population Trends, Ethnicity and Religion among the Buryats,” 170; Jessica Jacobson, “Descendants of the Swan,” *Russian Life*, November/December 2003: p. 60.

<sup>554</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 275; Sanzhiyeva, “Obrazovaniye Buryat-Mongol’skoy avtonomnoy sovetskoy sotsialisticheskoy respubliki,” 32.

<sup>555</sup> In some cases the resistance was even violent, as some party secretaries and functionaries as well as policemen were killed. Vatanabe, *Obryady i politicheskaya integratsiya u buryat*, 44.

<sup>556</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 333.

farms—by the end of 1932. Those were characterized by mismanagement and low productivity throughout the Soviet period.<sup>557</sup>

The same held true for the factories which were hastily built as part of the nation-wide industrialization campaign in the following years in Verkhneudinsk, the republic's capital, which was renamed Ulan-Ude in 1934. The constant failures of the town's locomotive and rail car repair plant, for instance, had a negative impact on the transportation capacity of the whole Trans-Siberian Railroad.<sup>558</sup> Other factories built in Ulan-Ude in those years were: a glass factory, a shipyard, an aircraft factory, a grist mill, a meat canning factory, and others. The workforces who first built and then worked in them were, for the most part, Russians who were recruited (or sent) from the western parts of the Soviet Union. Tens of thousands of them streamed into Ulan-Ude in these years—a migration which not only let rise the town's population to 125,000 by 1939 (from just 21,600 in 1923!),<sup>559</sup> but also greatly altered the numerical ratio between the Russians and the Buryats in the Republic. The latter's contingent dropped below 40 percent.<sup>560</sup>

Thus, Latinization and Cyrillization alienated the Buryats from their own language, collectivization destroyed their traditional economy and way of life, religious persecution mauled their traditional moral authorities, and Russian immigration made them a minority in their own country. What remained was the partial political autonomy, which was conceded to them by establishing 'their' single united republic, the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR. Yet, in 1937, this was also reversed by an order from Moscow. By a surprise decree of the central government of the Soviet Union from September 27 that year, the Republic was dismembered by administratively separating the Aga Region from it as well as the entire territory to the west of Lake Baikal that had belonged to the Republic. The greater parts of these two areas were made so-called "Buryat-Mongolian National Regions," which, however, were completely surrounded by the Irkutsk and Chita Provinces, respectively. The remaining parts were fully incorporated into these two Provinces, without any special status. Thus, by this coercive measure the autonomy rights of the

---

<sup>557</sup> Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, 124; Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 302; Humphrey, "Buryats," 293–94; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 332–34; Sanzhiyeva, "Obrazovaniye Buryat-Mongol'skoy avtonomnoy sovetskoy sotsialisticheskoy respubliki," 44–46; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 63–71.

<sup>558</sup> Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, 121.

<sup>559</sup> Sergey Basayev, "Mikhey Yerbanov—palach Kolchaka i zhertva Choybalsana," part 3, *Novaya Buryatiya*, June 27, 2011: p. 15, and part 4, *Novaya Buryatiya*, July 11, 2011: p. 15.

<sup>560</sup> Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, 123–24; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 333; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 86.

Buryats who lived in these areas, were significantly curtailed, or taken away from them altogether. At the same time this action was also a grievous, if not mortal blow to Buryat self-determination in the shrunken Buryat-Mongolian ASSR itself, because in the areas that were cut off lived about 40 percent of its Buryat population. As a result, the Buryats' share of the Republic's population, which had, as mentioned above, already before considerably fallen, now dropped to just 21.3 percent.<sup>561</sup>

Simultaneously, i.e. also at the end of September 1937, all Buryat members of the Republic's government were arrested—that is, almost the entire government. In the space of a few days they were convicted in show-trials for “being wreckers, ‘bourgeois’ nationalists and fascist agents intent upon separating Buryatia from the Soviet Union and making it a vassal of Japan”<sup>562</sup> and were executed shortly afterwards. For instance, the government's chairman and party secretary of Buryatia, aforementioned Mikhey Yerbanov, was arrested on September 20 and executed on October 12. He was replaced by the Party apparatchik Semen Denisovich Ignat'ev, a Russian from outside of Buryatia. In the following months practically the whole Buryat intelligentsia and many other leaders, including party and kolkhoz functionaries, were also purged. According to the latest data, 6,836 people were arrested, of whom 2,483 were shot.<sup>563</sup> At the height of this pogrom, in November 1937, wages for industrial workers in Siberia were raised by a decree of the central government in Moscow, which triggered another migration wave of mostly Russian workers into Buryatia.<sup>564</sup>

This trend even continued during World War Two, because industrial production was moved in large scale from the war-affected European parts of Russia to Siberia including Buryatia, where more factories were built, and the existing ones extended. Therefore, although about 40,000 people from Buryatia—among them many Buryats—died in the war, the overall population of the Republic and in particular that of its capital nonetheless further increased. This

---

<sup>561</sup>Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, 122; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 334; Yelayev, *Buryatskiy narod*, 216–17; Chimitdorzhiev, *Buryat-mongoly*, 35–36; Sanzhiyeva, “Obrazovaniye Buryat-Mongol'skoy avtonomnoy sovetsskoy sotsialisticheskoy respubliki,” 57–58; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 76–77.

<sup>562</sup>Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 334.

<sup>563</sup>Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, 122; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 334–35; Yelayev, *Buryatskiy narod*, 216; Chimitdorzhiev, *Buryat-mongoly*, 37; Sanzhiyeva, “Obrazovaniye Buryat-Mongol'skoy avtonomnoy sovetsskoy sotsialisticheskoy respubliki,” 57–58; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 71–73.

<sup>564</sup>Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, 123; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 333.

however meant that, in turn, the Buryats' share of it further decreased, because the industrial workers who immigrated were of course, again, mainly Russian.<sup>565</sup>

The war- and post-war periods in Buryatia were characterized by the ideological dictatorship prevailing in the whole Soviet Union. The Communist Party and its propaganda machine were omnipresent and controlled all spheres of life. One example was the above described control of Buddhism. Other areas of control were science and literature. For example, historians falsified the history of the Russian conquest and colonization of Buryatia into a 'voluntary entry of the Buryats into the Russian state,' and government officials denounced the national Buryat *Geser* epos as a 'pan-Mongolian' and 'feudalistic' idealization of Genghis Khan and made it for years (from 1948 to 1954) impossible to openly perform, or even to conduct research on it.<sup>566</sup>

Year-long accusations that 'pan-Mongolistic' tendencies are growing among the Buryats—although they were fabricated, as later was admitted—led to the renaming of the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR and the two Buryat-Mongolian National Regions (Aga and Ust'-Orda) into just Buryat ASSR and Buryat National Regions by a decree from Moscow in 1958.<sup>567</sup> This move has been hurting many Buryats, who felt that an important part of their identity and historical heritage was cut off from them. Yet, nothing could be done about it under the totalitarian conditions in the Soviet period, and demands to reverse this decision raised in the post-Soviet period were also not successful. In 1974, the last remnants of traditional Buryat(-Mongolian) terminology in official usage were abandoned by renaming the *aimaks*, the administrative subunits of the Republic, into *rayony*, the Russian word for "districts."<sup>568</sup> A few years later, in 1977 and 1978 respectively, the two Buryat *National* Regions, Aga and Ust'-Orda, were renamed *Autonomous* Regions.

Already four years earlier, in 1970, the school reforms that were started in the mid-1960s had been completed: the Buryat language was abandoned as the language of instruction for any subject at any level. Although the Republic's government attempted a volte-face eleven years

---

<sup>565</sup> Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 86–87.

<sup>566</sup> Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, 126; Humphrey, "Buryats," 293; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 376–77; Sanzhiyeva, "Obrazovaniye Buryat-Mongol'skoy avtonomnoy sovet'skoy sotsialisticheskoy respubliki," 102–3.

<sup>567</sup> Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 377; Yelayev, *Buryatskiy narod*, 245–47; Chimitdorzhiev, *Buryat-mongoly*, 110–11; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 114–15.

<sup>568</sup> Chimitdorzhiev, *Buryat-mongoly*, 42–43.

later, the loss its earlier action had caused could not be repaired.<sup>569</sup> A whole generation of Buryats grew up without schooling in their language and the domination of Russian in all spheres of life further increased. The Buryat language could never again be fully reintroduced as a language of instruction in the schools. Only in a small number of elementary schools could this be achieved.

Despite all attacks on their culture, living conditions impairments in the rural areas, and the persecutions, purges, and terrors they were subjected to, the Buryats nonetheless did astonishingly well in several respects during the Soviet period. First and foremost, they took advantage of the enormously enlarged and highly improved educational system. As stated above, when this system was developed, the Buryat schools grew faster than the Russian ones. Regarding academic institutions, it was Buryats who started them in the 1920s and they have been dominant in these institutions ever since. Not even the purges of 1937–38 changed this. Also in all other ‘white collar’ jobs, Buryats were overrepresented throughout the whole Soviet period (and are still today). The percentage of Buryats among doctors, teachers, judges, kolkhoz directors, journalists, artists, administrators, etc., and also—before the purges and soon afterwards—among government officials, including ministers and the council of ministers’ chairs, was always higher than their share of the Republic’s total population. Especially dominant was this Buryat ‘intelligentsia’ in the rural areas, and from the 1970s onward, when more and more Buryats moved to the Republic’s capital Ulan-Ude, they increased their domination of cultural, administrative, medical, and other important institutions in this town also.<sup>570</sup>

The greater possibility to get a job in such institutions particularly triggered the large scale migration of Buryats from the rural areas—with their depressingly stagnating kolkhozes—into Ulan-Ude, which facilitated a modern urban lifestyle. Particularly significant was this migration from the Ust’-Orda Buryat National Region and other areas of predominantly Buryat population in the Irkutsk Province as well as—a bit less, though—from the Aga Buryat National Region in the Chita Province. Many of the Buryats from these regions decided to leave for Ulan-Ude to

---

<sup>569</sup> Humphrey, “Population Trends, Ethnicity and Religion among the Buryats,” 160; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 378–79; B. Vasil’yev, “Sberegi yazyk, togda sberezhem narod,” *Buryatiya*, July 2, 1997: p. 7; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 130–31, 137–38.

<sup>570</sup> Humphrey, “Population Trends, Ethnicity and Religion among the Buryats,” 153–58; idem, “Buryats,” 294, 296; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 115.

take advantage of the opportunities this city offered them. Being the capital of the Buryat ASSR, “all its party, soviet and cultural institutions established a network of posts in which Buryats had to have a prominent place.”<sup>571</sup> What enabled them to meet this demand was their high education level. In 1970, ten percent of the Buryats had higher education, a number far exceeding those of other minorities in Siberia and even that of Western countries in that time. As a result, also among the Buryats—who, even under the rather adverse conditions after the forced collectivization, nonetheless have held dear to their rural lifestyle longer than hardly any other groups in Soviet Russia—ensued a considerable process of urbanization. From 1970 to 1979, their number in Ulan-Ude increased by 56 percent and this trend continued in the following decades.<sup>572</sup>

As life in the city was dominated by the Russians, because they nonetheless stayed in the clear majority there (and still hold it today), this urbanization process led to further Russification of the Buryats. The Russian language has especially always dominated in the town. For instance, whereas in the rural Buryat areas the one, local, and often only available newspaper was usually in Buryat (hence, in fact, the entire press), Russian newspapers dominated in the town. The same held true for books. Russian literature dominated on all shelves in the bookstores. This also did not change in the 1980s, when first—in 1981, together with the attempt to revive Buryat as the language of instruction in the schools—the government tried to increase publishing in Buryat by decree, and neither when later—in the perestroika period—this was demanded by Buryat writers and other intellectuals.<sup>573</sup> The decline of the Buryat language could not be stopped. Fewer and fewer Buryat books and newspapers were printed and less and less Buryat radio and television programs aired,<sup>574</sup> as fewer and fewer people could understand them.

This widespread language loss, however, did not mean that the Buryats lost their ethnic identity, because for them other identity-establishing features were (and are) of the same, if not of higher importance. In particular three of them can be identified: First, was the high importance kinship had (and still continues to have) for them. British anthropologist Caroline Humphrey describes this most aptly in her seminal study of the life in a Buryat *kolkhoz* in the 1970s:

---

<sup>571</sup> Humphrey, “Population Trends, Ethnicity and Religion among the Buryats,” 159; idem, “Buryats,” 295; Urchanova, “Die nationale Frage in Burjatien,” 189.

<sup>572</sup> Humphrey, “Population Trends, Ethnicity and Religion among the Buryats,” 150–58.

<sup>573</sup> Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 190.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid., 234.

Many people in Buryat collective farms today remember genealogies going back twelve or more generations, and literally everyone knows an extensive network of kin, amounting to well over a hundred names in the present generation. In making marriages the principles of lineal exogamy are still observed. It is clear that kinship as a social phenomenon beyond the immediate family has not lost its significance.<sup>575</sup>

Second, and probably at least partially a consequence of how important and highly valued descent is for them, Buryats very seldom married non-Buryats. This held true throughout the Tsarist period and did also not change much in the Soviet period, even in kolkhozes with mixed populations. They worked together with Russians, but they did not live together with them, and they were keen on preserving their customs and traditions, differentiating them from the Russians and anybody else. However, as regards inter-ethnic marriages, they became more frequent among the urbanized Buryats from the 1970s onward. Of all Buryat marriages in Ulan-Ude, twenty-one percent were mixed marriages in 1975.<sup>576</sup>

This, however, did not have much influence on the third main reason for the Buryats' remarkably resilient ethnic cohesion. The vast majority of the Buryats, no matter rural or urban, and including the children from mixed marriages, adhered to many of their customs during the Soviet period, including peculiar eating habits, home decoration styles, festivities (especially weddings), games, songs, dances, etc., but most importantly religious rituals. Most of the Buryats have always participated in their clan's shamanistic sacrificial rituals, which according to the traditional belief need to be performed, at least once a year, in order to stay protected by the clan's ancestral spirits. This and other shamanistic ritualistic practices the Soviets could never make extinct.<sup>577</sup> Even in times when it was extremely dangerous to perform or to participate in such rituals, they were secretly carried out, because they "had to," as one elderly Buryat simply put it, while speaking of the dangers people faced in Soviet times. He was just one of very many who—by taking a risk—made sure the customs got passed on. The same with Buddhism: despite persecution against it, even fiercer than against shamanism, a legion of "devout grandparents passed on Buddhist beliefs to their grandchildren."<sup>578</sup> It is stunning how many Buryats tell you

---

<sup>575</sup> Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 47.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*, 34; *idem*, "Population Trends, Ethnicity and Religion among the Buryats," 161–62.

<sup>577</sup> Baldayev, "Perezhitki shamanstva u buryat," 24; Humphrey, "Buryats," 295.

<sup>578</sup> Jessica Jacobson, "Descendants of the Swan," *Russian Life*, November/December 2003: p. 60.

stories of how they secretly prayed Buddhist mantras together with their grandmother every morning.

The last years of Soviet rule also in Buryatia were characterized by Gorbachev's venture of *perestroika*—i.e. to “rebuild” or “transform” the Soviet Union. Most importantly, this meant that people finally could speak up and disseminate their opinions freely, as censorship was for the most part lifted. Instead *glasnost*—“transparency”—was encouraged, i.e., full information and open discussion. In this change the Buryat intelligentsia once again made the most noticeable appearance in Buryatia. From 1986 onward, scholars of the Buryat Institute of Social Sciences of the local branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR—mainly ethnographers, folklorists and linguists—took a leading role in a movement, which demanded the promotion of the Buryat language, Buryat customs, and their traditional religions—i.e. Buddhism and shamanism—as well as the annulment of the 1937 dismemberment of the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR and its name change following in 1958. In the subsequent one-and-a-half decades, numerous conferences, congresses, and other events were organized; petitions, open letters, and many articles were published, all of which argued for the above and additional demands and called for their realization.<sup>579</sup>

This movement, however, never developed a strong coherent organization. To the contrary, various organizations emerged (or joined), some of which were political parties, but more were cultural organizations. The most noteworthy among them is the All-Buryat Association for Cultural Development,<sup>580</sup> which still exists today, and has some say in cultural and ethno-political affairs in the Republic.<sup>581</sup> In a great measure, this movement was driven by individuals with no specific membership or commitment to a particular organization.

Nonetheless, the movement had some success. In political terms, the greatest success was the March 1990 ouster of Anatoli Belyakov, the unpopular first Russian chairman of the Republic's government after decades of Buryats in this position. He was replaced by Leonid Potapov, who was also Russian, but much more attached to Buryat customs, traditions, and affairs than Belyakov, as he had grown up in a Buryat village and even spoke some Buryat. He and other

---

<sup>579</sup> Humphrey, “Buryats,” 300; Zhukovskaya, “Religion and Ethnicity,” 30–32; Urchanova, “Die nationale Frage in Burjatien,” 194–200; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 231–41.

<sup>580</sup> In Russian: “Всебурятская ассоциация развития культуры (*Vseburyatskaya assotsiatsiya razvitiya kul'tury*)”. It is telling that the organization does not have a Buryat name, but only this Russian one. This shows how “severely endangered” the Buryat language indeed is.

<sup>581</sup> Urchanova, “Die nationale Frage in Burjatien,” 202.



members of his government and of the Republic's administration worked closely with members of the new Buryat emancipation movement, which led to more governmental support for Buryat cultural activities and affairs and for religious ones as well. As one of the first actions in this regard, the Republic's Supreme Soviet declared the Buddhist New Year's holiday *Sagaalgaan* an official annual state holiday in 1990. Besides smaller events like the national Buryat *Surkharban* sports festivals, which were carried out in a markedly Buryat way from 1990 onward, Potapov's government facilitated, supported and even organized a number of big events and important activities with international significance. For instance, for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the official recognition of Buddhism in Russia by Tsarina Elisabeth, celebrated in Buryatia in July 1991, the government facilitated a visit of the Dalai Lama. Thousands of Buryats turned out to see and worship him. Thus, the decades-long Soviet persecution of religion in Buryatia had come to an ostentatious end. A few months later, the Soviet Union ended altogether.<sup>582</sup>

### ***The post-Soviet period (1991 – present)***

The transition process from being part of the Soviet Union to becoming part of the Russian Federation went very smoothly in Buryatia. Potapov's government stayed in power. The Supreme Soviet's declaration of the Republic's sovereignty, made during the fall of 1990, had mere symbolic power, as had the several consecutive name changes for the Republic, in which every time one more modifier was dropped—first “Autonomous” (in 1990), then “Socialist” (in 1991), then “Soviet” (in 1992) to name it finally the Republic of Buryatia, which is still its official name today.<sup>583</sup>

In regards to the main political demands of the emancipation movement—to annul the 1937 dismemberment of the BMASSR and its name change in 1958—Potapov's government, as well as the Supreme Soviet, which was renamed into the People's *Khural* (Buryat for “Assembly”), took effective action neither before nor after the fall of the Soviet Union. In 1993, the government declared the 1937 act unlawful, but let the matter rest there, that is, never undertook anything to reverse this act despite its ‘unlawfulness.’ The government had support for this

---

<sup>582</sup> Zhukovskaya, “Religion and Ethnicity,” 39; Jessica Jacobson, “Sagaalgaan,” *Russian Life*, November/December 2010: p. 59; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 241–46, 255.

<sup>583</sup> Zhukovskaya, “Religion and Ethnicity,” 30; Leisse and Leisse, “A Siberian Challenge,” 773.

ignorance from the majority of the Buryats living in the two Autonomous Regions that were cut-off in 1937, because their economic ties with the Irkutsk and Chita Provinces, respectively, had become so close that they feared a reunion with the Republic would be another cut-off causing negative consequences for them once again.<sup>584</sup> The demand to return the Republic its original name Buryat-Mongolia was supported by many Buryats and hotly discussed throughout the 1990s and thereafter, but it was never enacted either. In part, this was due to the fact that another demand of the Buryat emancipation or—as what it is often referred to—*national* movement also never got accepted: to grant Buryats 50 percent of the seats in the People's Khural.<sup>585</sup> The Russian majority there did not let this happen. Thus, this movement was not very successful, especially with respect to its political demands. Similar to the transition period from Tsarist to Soviet rule also in this transition period from Soviet totalitarianism to a more democratic governance, the Buryats could not form a united movement and once again aimed at reforms of a political system in which they did not have much of a say as a minority constituting less than 30 percent of the Republic's population.

Another reason for the weakness of this movement was the catastrophic economic situation in the early 1990s, when the Soviet planned economy collapsed and the overnight introduction of a market economy caused mass unemployment and empty government coffers, so that even those who retained their jobs did often not get paid for months as pensioners did not receive their pensions. In rural areas, people did not see money at all for long periods, as bankrupt kolkhozes could pay their employees only with animal feed and staples.<sup>586</sup> In this situation, not many people had a stomach for politics. Instead many—in fact the majority—sought refuge in religions.

Buryatia was no exception to the general trend, which could be observed in all former Soviet or 'communist' societies. In all of them, people, in addition to dire economic conditions, suffered from profound crises of identity when they, all of a sudden, had to construct such on their own, as they were no more 'Soviet citizens' and 'comrades' they used to be for decades and had been

---

<sup>584</sup> Humphrey, "Buryats," 301; Zhukovskaya, "Religion and Ethnicity," 40–41; Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 253–54, 257.

<sup>585</sup> This was, for instance, demanded by the All-Buryat Association for Cultural Development and its chairman Yevgeniy Yegorov. See, e.g., an interview with him, published in the newspaper "Buryatiya" in summer 1997. Al'bina Andreyeva, "Chto vek gryadushchiy nam gotovit?", *Buryatiya*, August 21, 1997: p. 3. See also Zhukovskaya, "Religion and Ethnicity," 31–32, and Urchanova, "Die nationale Frage in Burjatien," 188.

<sup>586</sup> Jessica Jacobson, "Descendants of the Swan," *Russian Life*, November/December 2003: pp. 58–59.

sure to remain for the rest of their life. Now, by contrast, “the future suddenly became elusive and unsure and the past had been declared untrue.”<sup>587</sup> In this situation, many people turned to the only institutions which in all this chaos seemed to provide stable and trustworthy moral guidance—religions; and most of them chose their ‘traditional’ religion. Thus, shamanism and Buddhism blossomed and thrived among the Buryats from the late 1980s onward, as did—starting shortly later—Russian-Orthodox Christianity among the Russians.<sup>588</sup> For the Buryats, especially, their religious confessions became for most of them a part of their ethnic or national identity, of their essential ‘Buryatness.’ American historian Melissa Chakars summarizes these developments and their interpretation by some of the leading anthropologists who specialize in Buryat affairs as follows:

Most impressive has been a great resurgence of Buddhism and shamanism. Buddhist temples and shrines dot the landscape, Buddhist and shamanist ceremonies are commonplace, and both lamas and shamans are readily available for consultation on just about anything. Scholars who have studied this phenomenon have argued that it represents a new, post-Soviet Buryat identity. In particular, Darima Amogolonova, Anya Bernstein, and Natalia Zhukovskaia have argued that, thanks to the widespread growth of both old and new Buddhist institutions, Buryats have increasingly begun to equate Buryat identity with religion. [...] Buddhism has become a new marker of the Buryat nation in the post-Soviet period. [...] shamanism too has been cited as being related to a sense of Buryatness.<sup>589</sup>

My personal observations, from 1996 onward, fully correspond with this portrayal. Both Buddhism and shamanism have indeed pervaded all spheres of life in Buryatia, and even those of Russians, as many of them also frequently consult shamans or lamas “on just about anything.”

---

<sup>587</sup> Urchanova, “Die nationale Frage in Burjatien,” 192, translation mine.

<sup>588</sup> Buddhism, shamanism, and Russian-Orthodox Christianity are clearly the three main religions in Buryatia. There are, however, also some other religious groups and organizations who have followers in Buryatia: a (mostly Tatar) Muslim community, Seventh Day Adventists, a Swedish Protestant mission, the Catholic Church, a branch of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, a branch of the International Community of Baha’i, and others. Their membership figures are, however, small—some of them not exceeding a hundred members. Cf. Zhukovskaya, “Religion and Ethnicity,” 40.

<sup>589</sup> Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia*, 268. See also Zhukovskaya, “Religion and Ethnicity,” 38–39, and Urchanova, “Die nationale Frage in Burjatien,” 192.

The most recent political developments of more than short-term significance have been measures which further diminished Buryat autonomy rights. In 2005, Russian president Vladimir Putin started a campaign aimed at merging several of the 89 administrative units of the Russian Federation to reduce their number and create larger ones on average, which, as he and his followers argued, would improve government efficiency and boost economic development. Whether this goal could be reached or not, remains an open question. However, one already can say, that several ethnic minority groups have lost their autonomy rights by this measure, as their autonomous regions became parts of greater, Russian-dominated, provinces. Among them were the Ust'-Orda Buryat Autonomous Region and the Aga Buryat Autonomous Region. Referendums held in 2006 in Ust'-Orda and 2007 in Aga ended in both cases with over 90 percent of the votes in favor of the mergers. However, voices could be heard who asserted various kinds of pressure were put on the voters to achieve these results. The merger of the Ust'-Orda Buryat Autonomous Region with the Irkutsk Province became effective as of January 1, 2008, and the Aga Buryat Autonomous Region's merger with the Chita Province as of January 1, 2010. Since these dates, they no more bear the term "autonomous" in their name and do not have any budget funds of their own disposal.<sup>590</sup>

In regards to post-Soviet demographic developments which involved Buryats, two of them are noteworthy. First, descendents of those Buryats who emigrated in the course of the Civil War and during the collectivization campaign to the Barga region in Inner Mongolia, that is, to China, began to 'remigrate' to their ancestral homeland immediately after the end of the Soviet Union. In the course of several years, several thousand of them settled mainly in the Aga Region and in Ulan-Ude.<sup>591</sup> From the Republic and from the two (then still) Autonomous Regions, many migrated, in turn, to greater cities in Russia, especially Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as foreign countries, mostly in the Western region. This migration was also significant, as each of the Buryat communities in the two largest Russian cities became several thousand members

---

<sup>590</sup> Jessica Jacobson, "Sagaalga," *Russian Life*, November/December 2010: p. 55; idem, "Buryats Worried by Future in Newly Merged Territory," *The Huffington Post* ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/j-lee-jacobson/buryats-worried-by-future\\_b\\_415670.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/j-lee-jacobson/buryats-worried-by-future_b_415670.html), accessed April 9, 2015); idem, "Siberian Buryats Struggle With Loss of Autonomy," *Transitions Online*, May 24, 2010 (<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=1&sid=6d65f1f7-aa8f-43c5-a546-9c63f8f60dc1%40sessionmgr4001&hid=4104&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=aph&AN=52290289>, accessed April 9, 2015).

<sup>591</sup> Musch, *Nomadismus und Sesshaftigkeit bei den Burjaten*, 14.

strong and hundreds of Buryats, if not over a thousand, continue to live outside of Russia today. This migration had mostly economic reasons, because the labor market in Buryatia, especially in the crisis years of the 1990s and especially for skilled and educated Buryats (which was a large demographic) could not offer enough jobs. Thus, one can categorize this migration as a ‘brain drain’, as many of the most skilled and knowledgeable had left Buryatia during this time.

In the course of the first decade of the twenty-first century and up to 2014, the economic situation has, however, improved in Buryatia, as it had in Russia, overall. This improvement enabled the Republic’s government to give more support to spheres other than those of basic needs. Cultural events, sports, and educational projects benefitted greatly from this support, among them many with a strong or solely Buryat involvement base. Buryat theater, dance, sports, and more were supported by the government and the Buryat language was especially strongly promoted by organizing events like the “Day of the Buryat Language” or similar competitions among students. All this is ongoing until this day. The efforts indicate that one wants to make up for prior failures. Regarding the Buryat language, however, it might be too late, as there are no signs the overwhelming dominance of Russian usage can be reduced anywhere soon. Regarding other spheres of Buryat culture—music, dance, theater, sports, etc., but most importantly religion, there is no reason for fearing they may suffer the same fate as the Buryat language. Today, Buryat culture and religions flourish, while the Buryat language ails and Buryat autonomy has become history.

In what follows I will describe the historical developments in one of the spheres of Buryat culture which particularly flourishes today: Buryat traditional sports. First, in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I will separately describe the characteristics and historical developments of these three sports, Buryat wrestling, Buryat archery, and Buryat horse racing, and then, in Chapter 6, that of the Buryat traditional sports festivals.

## Chapter 3:

### *Bukhe barildaan—Buryat Wrestling*<sup>592</sup>

Of the three traditional Buryat sports, wrestling has always been the most popular among both the Buryat sportspeople and the Buryat public. Therefore Buryat authors, and non-Buryat too—whether working in fiction, non-fiction, or in scientific writing—have produced significantly more literature about Buryat wrestling than about the other two traditional sports.<sup>593</sup> This is no surprise because wrestling is considered to be, if not the oldest, at least one of the oldest human competitive physical activities worldwide.<sup>594</sup> As proven by a number of historical facts, this, too, holds true for wrestling in the area under consideration here.<sup>595</sup> These facts, moreover, underpin the equally universally believed link between wrestling and magic-religious cults and the belief that wrestling may even have had its origin in such cults—at least in this region of Inner Asia.

#### **Magic and military roots**

On rock faces near the banks of Lake Baikal and its outlet, the river Angara, petroglyphs from the Neolithic were discovered that depict anthropomorphic figures in moments of wrestling bouts. Some of these figures, however, bear zoomorphic features, including horns on their heads, heads shaped like those of birds and with beaks, or trunks shaped like those of four-legged animals. What the Stone Age artists have depicted here, therefore, almost without any doubt, are

---

<sup>592</sup> Large parts of this section stem from my article “Wrestling Magic: National Wrestling in Buryatia, Mongolia and Tuva in the Past and Today,” published in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 31, no. 4 (2014): 423–44 (see bibliography), and are—with some adaptations—reproduced here with permission of the publisher.

<sup>593</sup> This also holds true for myself, as my publications about Buryat sports so far have also devoted more attention to wrestling than to archery and horse racing, especially, and most recently, my article, “Wrestling Magic: National Wrestling in Buryatia, Mongolia and Tuva in the Past and Today,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* vol. 31, no. 4 (2014): 423–44.

<sup>594</sup> See e.g. Kamphausen, “Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern,” 65; and Rudolph Brasch, *How Did Sports Begin? A Look into the Origins of Man at Play* (London: Longman, 1972), 250.

<sup>595</sup> See e.g. Erika Taube, “Die drei Wettspiele der Männer. Über die traditionellen Sportarten der Mongolen,” *Altertum* 22, 2 (1976): 99.

representations of *ritual* wrestling bouts, because ritualized—symbolic—bouts between totem animals or between the ‘good’ and the ‘evil’ forces have always been and still are central components of shamanistic rituals in this region and elsewhere. In these bouts, pairs of people, one of them usually a shaman, impersonate either totem animals or animals—real or mythical ones—that are considered very dangerous to humans and thus symbolize ‘evil’ or ‘dark’ forces.<sup>596</sup> In the case of the petroglyphs in the Baikal region, the representations of a bird as one of the combatants, in particular, corroborates the link between wrestling and magic. This for two reasons: first, because the imagination of the evil, yet supernaturally strong, mythical bird *muu shubuun*,<sup>597</sup> who is a great danger to human life and hence needs to be (symbolically) battled, is ancient and widespread in the region;<sup>598</sup> second—and more important—bird symbolism has always been present and prominent in Mongolian and Buryat wrestling and still is today. The *devekh*, or ‘eagle dance’,<sup>599</sup> is danced by the winning wrestlers after every bout and in Mongolia by both combatants also before the bout. This is clearly a form of sympathetic magic, as even into the present day the belief is that, by dancing this dance, the wrestlers receive strength from

---

<sup>596</sup> Aleksey P. Okladnikov, *Petroglify Baykala: Pamyatniki drevney kul'tury narodov Sibiri* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1974), 49–50 and 109–11; Anatoliy F. Reshetnikov and Zinaida I. Rabetskaya, “Istoricheskiy put' vozniknoveniya i razvitiya natsional'noy bor'by na osnove petroglifov baykal'skogo regiona,” in *Vestnik Buryatskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, issue 8, ed. D. N. Garmayeva (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2007).

<sup>597</sup> Buryat-Mongolian (Khalkha-Mongolian: *muu shuvuu*); translates as “bad bird” or “evil bird.” It is believed that the souls of girls who died young can turn into such ‘evil birds.’ They look like girls, but have a sharp beak, which they, however, cover with a veil or with their hands. They would lure people towards them and would then suck their blood out of their bodies with their beaks. They would also attack and kill people while the latter were sleeping. Matvey N. Khangalov and Nikolay N. Agapitov, “Materialy dlya izucheniya shamanstva v Sibiri. Shamanstvo u buryat Irkutskoy gubernii,” in Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1 (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004), 272; Matvey N. Khangalov, “Dukhi-lyudoyedy u buryat,” in Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 2 (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004), 164; Matvey N. Khangalov, “Mu-shubun,” in Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 3 (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004), 25–26; László Lőrincz, “Die mongolische Mythologie,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 27, 1 (1973): 120; Ágnes Birtalan, “Die Mythologie der mongolischen Volksreligion,” in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, ed. Egidius Schmalzriedt and Hans Wilhelm Haussig, Abteilung 1, Band 7, Teil 2 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), 1007–8; Okladnikov, *Petroglify Baykala*, 49.

<sup>598</sup> Lőrincz, “Die mongolische Mythologie,” 120; Okladnikov, *Petroglify Baykala*, 49, 110; Reshetnikov and Rabetskaya, “Istoricheskiy put',” 216.

<sup>599</sup> Mongolian and Buryat; translates as “to swing” or “to sway” or “to flap (one’s wings).” See Taube, “Die drei Wettspiele der Männer,” 102; Carole Pegg, *Mongolian Music, Dance, and Oral Narrative: Performing Diverse Identities* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 217.

the divine and become as strong as eagles.<sup>600</sup> Furthermore, this dancing practice furnishes proof of wrestling's close link with shamanism among the Mongols and Buryats, as Buryat shamans—who preserved many of the ancient traits of their faith—believe that they are descendants of the eagle, who, in turn, is believed to be a son of a *tengeri*, a sky god.<sup>601</sup>

The old age of the practice of wrestling duels in the region is also proved by the so-called “Ordos bronze plates”—girdle or belt plates made of bronze, dated from the fourth to the first century BCE and found at various archaeological sites all over the eastern part of the steppe belt, but showing the highest density of findings in the Ordos region in northern China at the southern fringe of the steppe belt. Wrestling bouts are depicted on three of the plates found so far.<sup>602</sup>

That wrestling has an age-old tradition among the Mongolian peoples is further proved by the numerous descriptions of wrestling bouts in the folk literatures of all these peoples, including the main, all-Mongolian, heroic *Geser* epos, which is considered to be over a thousand years old. Frequently, the wrestling bouts described in these folk tales are also clear examples of the mythic fight between the ‘good’ and the ‘evil’.<sup>603</sup>

---

<sup>600</sup> Bato-Munko Biliktuyev, personal communication, Kurumkan (Buryatia), June 2011; cf. Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 55; idem, *Games of Mongolian Shepherds* (Warsaw: 1991), 87; Sh. B. Mayny, “Ritual’nyy ‘tanets orla’ u tuvintsev,” in *Aktual’nyye problemy issledovaniya etnoekologicheskikh i etnnokul’turnykh traditsiy narodov Sayano-Altaya. Materialy I-oy mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii molodykh uchenykh, aspirantov i studentov* (Kyzyl: Ministerstvo obrazovaniya i nauki Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Ministerstvo obrazovaniya i nauki Respubliki Tyva, Ministerstvo po delam molodëzhi i sporta Respubliki Tyva, FGBOU VPO “Tuvinskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet”, 2012), 186.

<sup>601</sup> Demetrius Klementz, “Buriats,” in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1910), 15; Larisa D. Nikiforova, “Orël kak universal’nyy simvol dukhovnoy traditsii buryat,” in *Doklady i tezisy Mezhdunarodnogo simpoziuma “Buryat-mongoly nakanune III tysyacheletiya: opyt kochevoy tsivilizatsii, Rossiya-Vostok-Zapad v sud’be naroda” (24–28 avgusta 1997g.)*, ed. Irina S. Urbanayeva, Larisa D. Nikiforova and S. D. Batomunkuyev (Ulan-Ude: BNTs, 1997), 90; See also Lawrence Krader, “Buryat Religion and Society,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 10, 3 (1954): 332.

<sup>602</sup> See Wu En, “On the Origin of Bronze Belt Plaques of Ancient Nomads in Northern China,” *Chinese Archaeology* 3 (2003): 186; Yevgeniy S. Bogdanov and D. V. Kuznetsov, “Ordos Decorative Bronze Ware,” *Archaeology, Ethnology and Anthropology of Eurasia* 6 (2001): 109; and Manfred G. Raschke, “New Studies in Roman Commerce with the East,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, Band II, 9, 2, *Politische Geschichte: Provinzen und Randvölker: Mesopotamien, Armenien, Iran, Südarabien, Rom und der Ferne Osten*, ed. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978), 684.

<sup>603</sup> See Birtalan, “Die Mythologie der mongolischen Volksreligion,” 1028–29; Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 51; Sergey Y. Oorzhak, *Khuresh—filosofiya pobedy* (Kyzyl: Platina, 2008), 2–3; and Aleksandr V. Makhachkeyev and Tamara M. Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barilda. Osobennosti buryatskoy natsional’noy bor’by* (Ulan-Ude: NovaPrint, 2011), 16.



The oldest references in historiographic literature to wrestling in the region can be found in the *Liao-Shi*, the official chronicle of the Liao dynasty of the Khitan, who, as mentioned above, established an empire in Manchuria and northern China that lasted from 907 to 1125 CE. In this chronicle, we find detailed reports about professional wrestlers and wrestling competitions that were held—as were horse races and competitions in archery—to accompany weddings and various state ceremonies, including imperial shamanistic prayer ceremonies for rain.<sup>604</sup> Nonetheless, Rudolph Brasch’s statement in his well-known book “*How did Sports Begin?*” that “[t]he Mongolians and Chinese *made* it [i.e. wrestling] part of religious celebrations”<sup>605</sup> is not quite right. It is more correct to say that for them wrestling always *has been* part and parcel of such celebrations and still *is* today, thus was not *attached* to or *turned* into cultic ceremonies, but *has always been* an *integral part* of them, because the wrestling bouts themselves constitute acts of magic. Indicating this are the Neolithic rock paintings, the iconic bronze plates, the numerous legendary wrestling bouts in folk literature, the archaic eagle dance, the Khitan imperial rituals, and also the remembrances and narratives that countless informants have shared with ethnographers in the last one and a half centuries. As a result, all ethnographies and historical analyses concur that wrestling bouts have always been part of or associated with the shamanistic sacrificial cults with which the clans and whole peoples of Inner Asia have been thanking, honoring and pleasing their protector spirits.<sup>606</sup>

---

<sup>604</sup> See Karl A. Wittfogel and Fêng Chia-Shêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907–1125)*, vol. 36 of *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* (New York: Lancaster Press, 1949), 176 (professional wrestlers), 219 and 277 (wrestling at weddings), 254 and 413 (wrestling as part of ceremonies at the imperial court), 267 (archery contest as part of an imperial sacrificial ceremony for rain); G. Lkhagvasuren, “Fisicheskaya kul’tura v traditsiyakh gosudarstvennoy politiki Mongolii,” in *Fizicheskaya kul’tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost’, perspektivy: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, ed. Semën V. Manturov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’sтво Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998), 14.

<sup>605</sup> Brasch, *How Did Sports Begin?*, 256 (italics and explanatory addendum mine).

<sup>606</sup> See, e.g., Matvey N. Khangalov, “Novyye materialy o shamanstve u buryat,” in Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1 (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004), 422–23; Natal’ya L. Zhukovskaya, *Kategorii i simbolika traditsionnoy kul’tury mongolov* (Moskva: Nauka, 1988), 59; Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 49–50; and Gavril B. Bardamov and Vladimir A. Fomin, “Vozrozhdeniye natsional’noy traditsii v sisteme sostyazatel’noy deyatel’nosti,” in *Vozrozhdeniye traditsionnykh kul’tur narodov Buryatii: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii 14–15 maya 1998 g.* (Ulan-Ude: Pravitel’sтво Respubliki Buryatiya, Rossiyskaya Akademiya nauk Sibirskoye otdeleniye, Baykal’skiy institut prirodoopol’zovaniya, 1998), 143.

Also after the Mongols' and Buryats' conversion to Buddhism, the wrestlers continued to play their role as mediators between people and the divine.<sup>607</sup> In a mythical sense, they became even stronger than before, because now they no longer impersonated an eagle during their dances before and after the bouts, but the Buddhist, mythical, super-strong king of the birds, *Garuda*. The *Garuda* dance is performed, however, in exactly the same way as the eagle dance. Thus, the Buddhist clergymen simply replaced the—from their point of view 'primitive'—shamanistic zoolatrous figure with a 'higher' Buddhist one, but did not change the meaning of the ritual at all, as the dance still aims at a mental as well as physical self-elevation of the wrestlers.<sup>608</sup> In short, the Buddhist clergy made the wrestlers wrestle for their religious and other purposes, but did not change the way they wrestled. They utilized people's love of this sport by organizing competitions in the context of genuine Buddhist ceremonies, for instance the *maydar khurals*—ceremonies held in summer in honor of the future Buddha Maitrea<sup>609</sup>—or consecrations of new stupas. Also they organized them to honor high-ranking lamas. Moreover, Buddhist monasteries even had their own wrestlers, and usually the winning ones, because they paid them very well and provided them with food and shelter so that they could concentrate solely on practicing wrestling.<sup>610</sup>

As described in the previous chapter, for millennia, life in the Inner Asian steppe belt, including its northern fringes, where the Buryats emerged, was to a great extent characterized by frequent warfare. Early on, this also impinged on the *combat* sport of wrestling, and to a high degree, which is why one can also identify military roots in the wrestling styles of this region. These military roots are evident in the rules according to which the wrestlers have to compete—especially those governing how the victory is determined—and in the clothing they have to wear.

One wins the match when one's competitor's feet and *any one other part* of his body touch the ground; and this is the *only* possible way a match can be decided. Thus, there is no wrestling on the ground, no time limit, and no points system whatsoever.<sup>611</sup> This 'rule of the three dots'

---

<sup>607</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz, "Eriin Gurvan Naadam," 59–60.

<sup>608</sup> Pandito Khambo-Lama Damba Ayusheyev, personal communication, Ivolginskiy datsan, Buryatia, July 2010.

<sup>609</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz, "Eriin Gurvan Naadam," 47.

<sup>610</sup> Kherel-ool Dazhy-Namchalovich Oorzhak, *Istoriya razvitiya fizicheskoy kul'tury i sporta v Tuve do 1945 goda* (Kyzyl 1994), 12–13; Pegg, *Mongolian Music, Dance, and Oral Narrative*, 211.

<sup>611</sup> There is only a single report of a Buryat wrestling bout continuing on the ground. This can be found in an article of the Russian-Orthodox priest V. Kopylov from 1886, in which he describes *taylagany* of the cis-Baikal

derives from the steppe peoples' mounted form of warfare, in which a mounted warrior who had fallen off his horse no longer constituted even the slightest threat.<sup>612</sup>

Whereas this rule is universal (with only very minor differences) among both the Mongolian and Buryat wrestlers, their clothing differs significantly: the *dzodok*—a special jacket that covers only the back and the arms, but leaves the chest and the belly of the wrestler uncovered—is worn by the wrestlers in Mongolia, but not by those in Buryatia, who do not wear anything above the belt. The Buryat ethnographer and expert in the history of Mongolian wrestling, Dorzho Tsybikdorzhiev, explains this difference by the former existence of a second tradition of warfare and war magic in addition to the mounted combat of the steppe peoples: the tradition of the forest peoples who live on the fringes of the steppe belt. Given the natural environment there, these peoples' warriors tried to fight more like *feline* predators (tiger, panther, lion, etc.) than like the predator *birds* that the people of the steppe imitated. A *dzodok* does not provide any protection from a feline predator's paw swipes and attempts to break their prey animals' spines. But it does protect one from the typical attacks of predator birds, which usually try to grab their prey's backs with their claws.<sup>613</sup>

Thus, as Mongolian and Buryat wrestling are also rooted in warfare, holds, and other close combat techniques, which deliberately aimed at severely injuring or even killing one's opponent, were applied in former times.<sup>614</sup> The heroic epics and legends speak especially abundantly about

---

Buryats, that is, their shamanistic sacrificial rituals, which were typically accompanied by feasts and games. Kopylov describes, that in one wrestling bout, after both wrestlers had fallen to the ground, they continued to wrestle until "one could mount the other and began to crush him" (V. Kopylov, "Taylagany, ili obshchestvennyye zhertvoprinozheniya u severo-baykal'skikh Buryat," *Irkutskiye eparkhial'nyye vedomosti* 12 (1886), supplement, 163, translation mine). This report is either the exception that proves the rule or the result of a misunderstanding by its author.

<sup>612</sup> Dorzho V. Tsybikdorzhiev, "Istoriko-etnograficheskiye aspekty natsional'noy bor'by mongolov (boyevoye iskusstvo, epos i mif)," in *Mongolovednyye issledovaniya*, issue 3 (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs SO RAN, 2000), 71–72; Vladimir A. Fomin, "Vozrozhdaya traditsii," *Agenstvo sporta*, No. 1, March 2006: p. 25; idem, "Istoricheskiye korni buryatskogo troyebor'ya," in *Istoriko-kul'turnoye i sportivno-prikladnoye razvitiye natsional'nykh vidov sporta v Rossii: opyt regionov: materialy Vserossiyskoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, ed. M. D. Gulyayev (Yakutsk: FGOU VPO "ChGIFKiS", 2009), 296.

<sup>613</sup> Tsybikdorzhiev, "Istoriko-etnograficheskiye aspekty," 67–71.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid., 70–71; Vladimir A. Fomin and Vadim V. Shokhirev, "Osnovnye etapy stanovleniya bukhe barildaan," in *Sovremennyy olimpiyskiy i massovyy sport v kontekste 'vostok-zapad': Materialy III Mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, g. Ulan-Ude, 7–10 sentyabrya 2005 g., ed. Aleksey V. Gas'kov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2005), 136.

such techniques.<sup>615</sup> The incident told in the “*Secret History of the Mongols*” of Belgütei’s killing, or rather execution (as, reportedly, Genghis Khan himself nodded his approval), of Büri-bökö in a wrestling bout by allowing the former to break the latter’s spine, is a very famous example of this.<sup>616</sup> However, such brutality was never the rule in Mongolian and Buryat sportive wrestling, because it—at least later on—was constrained and highly restricted, for instance, by the ‘rule of the three dots.’

### Political utilizations of the past

Wrestlers have been held in the highest esteem among all Mongolian peoples at all times. The Buryats were anything but an exception. In former times, wealthy Buryat clan leaders nourished chosen wrestlers and furnished them with everything for months-long periods before competitions.<sup>617</sup> Furthermore, as the competitions did reveal the participants’ individual fighting skills, they, like all Mongolian khans, used them to recruit their life guards and elite troops.<sup>618</sup>

The first direct interference of a ‘*state government*’ in matters pertaining to wrestling is reported of the first actual state-like polity of the steppe. This was the Toba Empire in the southern parts of the Inner Asian steppe, which existed from the fourth to the sixth century CE, and allegedly the founder of that empire, Daowu Khan (371–409), decreed a rule change for wrestling.<sup>619</sup> As mentioned earlier, the Khitan emperors frequently staged wrestling competitions. And Mongolian khans early on had their own wrestlers or even wrestling teams,<sup>620</sup> as already found in the *Secret History*, which tells the story of Genghis Khan’s life and his rise to

---

<sup>615</sup> Attila-Endre Kovacs, “National Tradition: The Mongolian Wrestling,” in *Problemy traditsionnoy kul’tury narodov baykal’skogo regiona: Materialy mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii (2–3 iyulya 1999 g.)*, ed. Boris V. Banzarov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’stvo BNTs SO RAN, 1999), 46.

<sup>616</sup> *Secret History of the Mongols*, section 140. See, e.g., *The Secret History of the Mongols: The Life and Times of Chinggis Khan*, translated, annotated, and with an introduction by Urgunge Onon. London: Routledge, 2001.

<sup>617</sup> Matvey N. Khangalov, “Natsional’nyy prazdnik u buryat,” *Izvestiya Vostochno-Sibirskago otdela Russkago Geograficheskago obshchestva* 11, 3–4 (1880): 31.

<sup>618</sup> Zhukovskaya, *Kategorii i simbolika*, 59; Bardamov and Fomin, “Vozrozhdeniye natsional’noy traditsii,” 141; Vyacheslav Darzha, *Loshchad’ v traditsionnoy praktike tuvintsev-kochevnikov* (Kyzyl: TuvIKOPR SO RAN, 2003), 38; Valentina D. Babuyeva, *Material’naya i dukhovnaya kul’tura buryat* (Ulan-Ude: Tsentr sokhraneniya i razvitiya kul’turnogo naslediya Buryatii, 2004), 198; and Vladimir A. Fomin, Bayaskhalan Dabain and German Namzhilov, *Zolotaya kolybel’ chempionov* (Ulan-Ude: Baikal-Geo, 2011), 4.

<sup>619</sup> Lkhagvasuren, “Fisicheskaya kul’tura v traditsiyakh gosudarstvennoy politiki Mongolii,” 14.

<sup>620</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 46.

become the founder of the Mongolian empire in the early thirteenth century. In the aforementioned, fatal wrestling bout, one of the wrestlers is called the ‘state wrestler’.<sup>621</sup> The various more or less powerful khans, who ruled over smaller or larger parts of the steppe after the fall of the Great Mongolian Empire, maintained this tradition for several centuries.<sup>622</sup> During the Qing emperors’ rule over Mongolia, the “Ministry of the Administration” of Urga—in some way the principal camp or the ‘capital’ of Mongolia at that time—established direct state control over the Mongols’ favorite sports: it determined the number of the participating wrestlers and archers from each banner, approved the seconds and referees, defined the competition rules and even decided the colors of the clothing the wrestlers had to wear.<sup>623</sup> Equally, and early on too, the Russian Tsarist government utilized the Buryats’ love for their traditional sport games for generating or invigorating loyalty to the tsar.<sup>624</sup>

Thereafter, the same held true for the Soviet period. Wrestling competitions in the respective national styles held center stage at various state holidays of the many national and autonomous republics, provinces, regions, and districts the Soviet *Union* consisted of, and, for the most part, continued to do so throughout the whole Soviet period. In 1924, the Soviet authorities introduced in Buryatia the *Surkharban* festivals. Competitions in Buryat national wrestling played the most prominent role in these events, which have been organized annually at both the local and state level from the beginning to this day. This was in line with the Soviet policy from the early 1920s onwards of fostering wrestling in general, as this sport seemed eminently suitable to showcase the strength and health of Soviet society.<sup>625</sup> And supporting *national* wrestling styles was congenial to both the initial Soviet nationalities policy of *korenizatsiya*—the true promotion of the languages and traditional cultures of most of the peoples of the Soviet Union<sup>626</sup>—and to the later Stalinist policy of ‘national (only) in form, (but) socialist in content.’ As a consequence, tournaments in Buryat national wrestling were held not only at the traditionalistic Buryat

---

<sup>621</sup> Mongolian “Ulsyn böx.” The Secret History of the Mongols, section 140. See also Taube, “Die drei Wettspiele der Männer,” 100; and Lkhagvasuren, “Fisicheskaya kul’tura v traditsiyakh gosudarstvennoy politiki Mongolii,” 15–16.

<sup>622</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 46.

<sup>623</sup> Lkhagvasuren, “Fisicheskaya kul’tura v traditsiyakh gosudarstvennoy politiki Mongolii,” 16.

<sup>624</sup> See chapter 6, p. 246.

<sup>625</sup> Cf. Petar Petrov, “National Styles of Wrestling in the Soviet Union and the Post-Soviet States: Political and Sociocultural Aspects of Their Development and Use,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, 4 (2014): 407.

<sup>626</sup> The term literally translates as “enrooting,” meaning an indigenization or nativization.

Surkharban sport festivals, but also at events of pure Soviet style, like, for instance, at Spartakiades.<sup>627</sup> This practice has continued in the post-Soviet period; thus, also today competitions in Buryat national wrestling are part of practically any big sport event in Buryatia, no matter whether it is ‘traditional’ Buryat in style or not.<sup>628</sup>

Many of the ‘Soviet peoples’ ‘national’ wrestling styles befell a process of *internationalization*, because over time more and more elements from judo, *sambo*—a martial art style particularly popular among Russians<sup>629</sup>—and Olympic wrestling styles were incorporated into them.<sup>630</sup> For example, Buryat wrestling was deliberately made very similar to Olympic wrestling and cleared of any traditional, ritualistic elements and the slightest allusions to religion like the eagle (or Garuda) dance.<sup>631</sup> Traditionally, there had been no time limit, no weight classes, and no age classes either. A wrestling match could last for hours, one wrestler may have weighed twice as much as the other or even more, and a son could compete with his father.<sup>632</sup> Yet, in the late 1950s weight classes, a time limit and, as a consequence, the possibility of determining the winner of the match not by the rule of the three dots, but by judging the activity of the competitors, were introduced, as were age categories for juvenile wrestlers.<sup>633</sup> Moreover,

---

<sup>627</sup> See, e.g., Boris D. Sandanov, *Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport v Buryatii* (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1968), 41 and 79.

<sup>628</sup> See, e.g., Vladimir A. Fomin, G. N. Petrenko and A. I. Antropov, “Sportivnyye forumy sel'skoy molodëzhi Buryatii i Irkutskoy oblasti,” in *Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost', perspektivy: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, edited by Semën V. Manturov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998), 40.

<sup>629</sup> Abbreviation for (Russian) “*samozashchita bez oruzhiya*” – “self-defence without weapons.”

<sup>630</sup> Petrov, “National Styles of Wrestling in the Soviet Union and the Post-Soviet States,” 410–11.

<sup>631</sup> Boris D. Sandanov, “Surkharban—massovyy sportivnyy prazdnik buryatskogo naroda,” in *Voprosy preodoleniya perezhitkov proshlogo v bytu i soznanii lyudey i stanovleniya novykh obychayev i traditsii u narodov Sibiri*, vol. 2 (Ulan-Ude: SO AN SSSR, BION, 1966), 93; Fomin and Shokhirev, “Osnovnye etapy stanovleniya bukhe barildaan,” 135–36; Aleksandr Zil'berg, “Surkharban—99,” *Sport-ekspress*, No. 8 (32), August 1999: p. 105; Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barildaan*, 16 and 55.

<sup>632</sup> Sandanov, *Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport v Buryatii*, 12; idem, *Eryn gurban naadan (Tri igry muzhey)* (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1993), 54, 57–58. See also Valeriy Sydeyev, “Vnov' o bukhe-barildaan,” *Pravda Buryatii*, April 5, 1989.

<sup>633</sup> V. D. Dashinorboyev and B. D. Dashibal'zhirov, “O sokhranении traditsiy buryatskoy natsional'noy bor'by,” in *Vozrozhdeniye traditsionnykh kul'tur narodov Buryatii: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii 14–15 maya 1998 g.* (Ulan-Ude: Pravitel'stvo Respubliki Buryatiya, Rossiyskaya Akademiya nauk Sibirskoye otdeleniye, Baykal'skiy institut prirodoznan'ya, 1998), 136; Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barildaan*, 61–62. In 1968, a return to traditional practice was performed by (re)introducing at the Surkharbans a short tournament for the title of the “absolute champion” in which the winners of the tournaments in the weight classes competed against each other. Vladimir A. Fomin and Vadim V. Shokhirev, “Narodnaya sistema fizicheskogo vospitaniya u buryat,” in *Istoriko-kul'turnoye i sportivno-prikladnoye razvitiye natsional'nykh vidov sporta v Rossii: opyt regionov: materialy*

the wrestlers quit wearing the traditional *shuudag*-shorts and *gutal*-boots and the use of the typical Buryat *bühe*, a cloth waist belt, was abolished. Together these three garments had made up their traditional attire. Thus, their ‘national’ wrestling lost many of its national, specifically Buryat, characteristics.<sup>634</sup> In addition, from the late 1950s onwards, concurrent with the Soviet push to compete internationally, Olympic freestyle wrestling was fostered to a much greater degree, and therefore Buryat national wrestling fell to second place in popularity among active sportspeople in the republic by the 1960s.<sup>635</sup> Notwithstanding, *Buryat* wrestling remained very popular among the Buryat public.

Summing up, the changes national wrestling in Buryatia underwent during the Soviet period can be described as secularization, politicization, and internationalization (with strong traits of Russification), which scoured the competitions’ rules as well as many of their specific national characteristics.

## Post-Soviet developments

In the crisis years after the breakdown of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Buryat national wrestling suffered further, as many wrestling sections of both schools and municipalities where it previously had been practiced were closed.<sup>636</sup> However, authorities in Buryatia began to perform an about-face. Now their declared aim became to ‘give back’ to the people their age-old rituals, customs and traditions, including national sports and in particular the Buryat national wrestling

---

*Vserossiyskoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, ed. M. D. Gulyayev (Yakutsk: FGOU VPO “ChGIFKiS”, 2009), 289.

<sup>634</sup> Fomin and Shokhirev, “Osnovnye etapy stanovleniya bukhe barildaan,” 135–36; Semën V. Manturov, Vladimir A. Fomin and Valeriy A. Strel’nikov, “Sportivnaya letopis’ Respubliki Buryatiya,” in *Fizicheskaya kul’tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost’, perspektivy: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, ed. Semën V. Manturov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’svo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998), 5; and Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barildaan*, 16 and 55.

<sup>635</sup> Manturov, Fomin and Strel’nikov, “Sportivnaya letopis’ Respubliki Buryatiya,” 12; M. B. Mitypov, F. M. Darkhanov and M. I. Shalakhov, “Razvitiye detsko-yunosheskikh sportivnykh shkol v Respublike Buryatiya,” in *Fizicheskaya kul’tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost’, perspektivy: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, ed. Semën V. Manturov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’svo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998), 27; Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barildaan*, 62; and Fomin, Dabain and Namzhilov, *Zolotaya kolybel’ chempionov*, 16 and 46–48.

<sup>636</sup> Tsyrenzhapov, “Natsional’nyu bor’bu spislyvat’ so schetov rano,” *Buryatiya*, June 25, 1993: p. 4. See also Krist, “Where Going Back is a Step Forward,” 105.

*bukhe barildaan*, the Buryat name it was now increasingly called.<sup>637</sup> *Bukhe barildaan* literally translates as “strongly gripping each other.” To ‘give it back’ to the Buryat public and to the Buryat sportspeople, however, meant that it needed to be actively *re*-traditionalized, because the aforementioned significant changes introduced during the Soviet period left very little of its authentic ‘traditional’ features.<sup>638</sup> This, however, took time. For instance, the time limit introduced during the Soviet period was abandoned only by 2005. Since then the matches again end only when one of the wrestlers had touched the ground with a third ‘dot’ of his body in addition to his feet. The tradition that every wrestler has a second who, during the match, holds his client’s hat, gives him advice and represents him before the judges which had never been abandoned in Mongolia, is only now being reintroduced in Buryatia. The same holds true for the tradition of awarding special titles—‘Falcon’, ‘Elephant’, ‘Lion’, ‘Titan’, etc.—to wrestlers who advance to the last rounds of a tournament.<sup>639</sup>

In this re-traditionalization process the (re-)introduction of one particular feature, the aforementioned cloth waist belts, *bühe*, became the most controversial issue. First, because the available ethnographic reports do not provide unambiguous information about their use in pre-Soviet times,<sup>640</sup> and second, because the Buryats living west of Lake Baikal, in particular, did not widely consider their use to be traditional. Thus, when the *bühe*-belts reappeared in the first years after the turn of the millennium, this was far from being a universal, all-Buryat development, but one confined to only certain regions.<sup>641</sup> By 2010 nonetheless, after a decade of long, at times heated, debate, their mandatory use was established for Buryat wrestling everywhere. In 2008 the established rules for the Buryat *bukhe barildaan*, including the mandatory use of the *bühe*, were published in a one-issue magazine titled “*Surkharban*”,<sup>642</sup> which has prefaces written by the president of the Republic of Buryatia, Vyacheslav Nagovitsin,

---

<sup>637</sup> Vladimir A. Fomin, “Po nepisannym zakonam predkov,” *Buryatiya*, May 11, 1991: p. 4; idem, “Vozrozhdaya traditsii,” *Agenstvo sporta*, No. 1, March 2006: p. 24.

<sup>638</sup> See Vladimir A. Fomin, “Vspomnim zabytyye igry!” *Pravda Buryatii*, April 27, 1995: p. 4.

<sup>639</sup> Taube, “Die drei Wettspiele der Männer,” 100; Zhukovskaya, *Kategorii i simbolika*, 63; Pegg, *Mongolian Music, Dance, and Oral Narrative*, 221–22; Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barildaan*, 50.

<sup>640</sup> See Vladimir A. Fomin, “Po nepisannym zakonam predkov,” *Buryatiya*, May 11, 1991: p. 4; idem, “Vozrozhdaya traditsii,” *Agenstvo sporta*, No. 1, March 2006: p. 24–25.

<sup>641</sup> The first districts, where wrestlers started to wear the waist belts again, were the Tunka and Zakamensk Districts in Southern Buryatia. Valeriy Sydeyev, “Natsional’naya bor’ba—“Bukhe barildaan”,” *Buryaad unen*, February 14, 2002.

<sup>642</sup> *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: pp. 18–19.



and the pandito khambo lama, the head of the leading Buddhist organization of Buryatia,<sup>643</sup> Damba Ayusheyev, documenting its approval on the highest levels. According to these rules, the Buryat wrestlers also have to wear again shuudag and gutal, that is the same brief shorts and smooth leather boots which are worn also by the Mongolian wrestlers. And these rules require the Buryat wrestlers to also dance the eagle dance,<sup>644</sup> a custom which had completely disappeared in Buryatia during the Soviet period.

It was in particular the Traditional Buddhist Association's<sup>645</sup> lamas who, under the leadership of Khambo Lama Ayusheyev, made the revitalization of the traditional Buryat sports one of their top priorities, already from the early 1990s onwards.<sup>646</sup> In particular they organize many wrestling tournaments (today about 25–30 every year), award very valuable prizes to the winners of them (cars, horses, sheep, money, etc.) and they even have founded special wrestling schools for Buryat national wrestling.<sup>647</sup> Furthermore, an increasing number of Buryat Buddhist lamas themselves practice this sport in their monasteries.<sup>648</sup> They view it as a means of self-perfection, which they consider important from a Buddhist point of view and for which Buryat wrestling is particularly suited. This is because Buryat wrestling is, as they say, like a tightrope walk. And this is indeed true, because of the strict 'rule of the three dots,' which determines that even to slightly touch the ground with only the tip of a finger already means that one has lost the match. Thus, to hold one's balance is of utmost importance in this type of wrestling. And in a Buddhist view it is exactly this skill which in both a strict and a figurative sense enables one to follow the Middle Way. Hence, Buryat wrestling in that view "is a key to possible comprehensions of the

---

<sup>643</sup> This is the "Buddhist Traditional *Sangkha* (i.e. "Association", "Assembly" or "Community of Monks") of Russia" (Russian: Буддийская традиционная сангха России / *Buddiyskaya traditsionnaya sangkha Rossii*), which considers itself the successor of the historical Buddhist clerical organization of the Buryats and is in fact the largest Buddhist organization not only of Buryatia, but of the whole of Russia. Most of the Buddhist monasteries in the area of Buryat settlement belong to this organization and their lamas acknowledge Khambo Lama Ayusheyev as their leader. There are, however, exceptions, as several splits have occurred since the 1990s, but Ayusheyev could maintain his leading position and, as it seems, even strengthen it in recent years.

<sup>644</sup> *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: pp. 18–19.

<sup>645</sup> See footnote 643.

<sup>646</sup> See, e.g., Fomin, Dabain and Namzhilov, *Zolotaya kolybel' chempionov*, 20–21; Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barilda*, 16 and 150.

<sup>647</sup> Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barilda*, 40–41, 47 and 51.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

deepest secrets of Buddha's teaching—to find the Middle Way,” as Khambo Lama Ayusheyev himself has put it.<sup>649</sup>

In addition, today's Buryat Buddhists also directly link Buryat wrestling with the Bodhisattva Vajrapani whom they consider their special protector deity among the members of the Buddhist pantheon. As he is the Buddhist god of war and power, he is also considered to be the patron of the wrestlers. Thus, by carrying out wrestling tournaments Buryat Buddhists thank him for his care for them. Hence, the wrestlers are, here again, considered to be mediators between the people and the divine.<sup>650</sup>

Since 2004, Buryat wrestling has also been linked to another Buryat (but not only Buryat) Buddhist holiness (or sanctity). This is the twelfth khambo lama, Dashi-Dorzho Itigelov (or his body), who (or which), following his own request, was unearthed 75 years after he ‘passed away’ (however, perhaps, only in the literal sense of that expression) at the age of about 75 after he was meditating (and not eating) for months. When unearthed in 2002, his body, although it had not been mummified or embalmed in any way, showed almost all properties of that of a person who had died just a few hours ago, and the body kept itself in this state to the present day. It is kept in the datsan of Ivolginsk, Buryatia's main Buddhist monastery and the seat of the present—the twenty-fourth—khambo lama, above mentioned Damba Ayusheyev. Although the body has been examined by pathologists and other experts, no scientific explanation of this phenomenon has been presented so far. Therefore Buryat (and other) Buddhist lamas and laypeople believe that it was (and perhaps still is) Itigelov's spiritual power and meditation skills, which enable(d) him to preserve his body, and that he did (or does) this in order to demonstrate the power of Buddha's teaching. Ayusheyev and his fellow lamas linked Buryat wrestling to Itigelov in two ways. First, since 2004, they organize annual ‘Itigelovian Games’ (Russian: *Itigelovskiye igry*) in the datsan of Ivolginsk, the wrestling tournaments of which they made—as their archery competitions and horse races likewise—the most important and prestigious of the whole year, because it is these games at which they award the winners the highest prizes. Second, in 2008, despite the fact that

---

<sup>649</sup> Pandito Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheyev in the one-issue magazine *Surkharban*, issued in 2008: p. 19 (translation mine). See also his prefaces in the same magazine (p. 3) and in Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barilda*, 10–11.

<sup>650</sup> See, e.g., Pandito Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheyev's preface in Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barilda*, 10.

this was not a traditional practice, they introduced three weight classes for Buryat wrestling, which they linked to Itigelov:

- (1) *Beyeny abarga* (“Champion of the Body”) for wrestlers weighing up to 63 kilograms (139 pounds) in remembrance of Itigelov’s weight in his (normal) life;
- (2) *Nahanay abarga* (“Champion of the Age”) for wrestlers weighing up to 75 kilograms (165 pounds) in remembrance of Itigelov’s age, at which he ‘passed away;’
- (3) *Buyanay abarga* (Champion of the Benefactions’) for wrestlers weighing over 75 kilograms in remembrance of Itigelov’s numerous benefactions.<sup>651</sup>

By inventing and introducing these weight classes Ayusheyev and his fellow lamas provide lighter wrestlers more chances to win titles and prizes than they would have, if they had insisted also in this case on going back to the traditional, i.e. pre-Soviet, customs, that is, to no weight classes at all. However, establishing just three such classes, is still less than the five of them, into which wrestlers were separated during the Soviet period—up to 50, 60, 70, 82, and over 82 kilograms—and the seven of them—up to 56, 64, 72, 80, 90, 100, and over 100 kilograms—into which they were sometimes split at *state* organized tournaments in post-Soviet time.<sup>652</sup> To have fewer weight classes for Buryat wrestling makes a lot of sense, nay makes even up its particular attractiveness for a large part, because one important and very appealing feature of it is that the weight and strength of a wrestler play not such an important role in it as in other wrestling styles. It is much more dexterousness, skillfulness, ingenuity, and experience which decide Buryat wrestling bouts.<sup>653</sup> Therefore it is possible that even in cases of a considerable weight difference between two competing wrestlers the lighter one can win, which in fact is described multiple times in the literature, and I myself witnessed this several times too. Of course, these cases are rare, but that’s what makes them—at least for Buryat wrestling fans—the unforgettable moments which are probably the prime cause of people’s love for any sport.

Thus the Buddhist clergy’s decision in this regard seems to be for the clear benefit of Buryat wrestling. And they did actually also not *break* with the tradition, as the competitions in these

---

<sup>651</sup> Lama Bair Tsybikov and Mikhail Dambyev, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, July 2010.

<sup>652</sup> This was done in the late 1990s (see e.g. German Namzhilon, “Surkharban – 99. Muzyka i pesni, sport i tanty,” *Buryatiya*, July 8, 1999: p. 2). Today the state organized tournaments in Buryat wrestling are again carried out by separating the wrestlers in five weight classes, up to 56, 64, 72, 82, and over 82 kilograms, i.e. specified slightly different from those in effect during the Soviet period.

<sup>653</sup> See e.g. Yekaterina Khyrtygeyeva, “Sostyazaniya metkikh, sil’nykh i bystrykh,” *Nomer odin*, July 21, 2010: p. 23.

three weight classes are only *added*, because competitions for the title of the ‘absolute champion’, which are open tournaments in which any male person, regardless of weight, age, or anything, can participate—that is, how it was the custom for ages—still constitute the main event of any Buryat wrestling tournament organized by the Buddhist clergy. Such ‘absolute competitions’ were likewise always part of the state organized tournaments, but, a few years ago in these tournaments, the previous additional five to seven weight classes were also abandoned and replaced with only the three ‘Itigelovian’ classes.

The peculiarities of Buryat wrestling—especially the ‘rule of the three dots,’ which requires the wrestlers to particularly focus on keeping their balance and to be very cautious of any attack, and hence to wrestle with great patience for waiting for the right moment, but also the special holds and techniques developed in this wrestling style—altogether make Buryat wrestling also an excellent base and build-up for Olympic freestyle wrestling. Therefore Buryat wrestlers have been competing very successfully in this international wrestling style from the 1960s onwards, both on a national level and internationally at European and world championships and Olympic Games, and they keep this up today.<sup>654</sup> This is why also the state’s sport officials of today feel nothing but positive about the recent blossoming of national Buryat wrestling due to the Buddhist clergy’s efforts.

Therefore today one can at many occasions—most of which organized by the Buddhist clergy, but some also by the state—still watch Buryat wrestling bouts with their very typical and unique characteristics described by ethnographers and travelers a hundred and more years ago, like, for instance by the slightly bewildered American collector of folk literature, Jeremiah Curtin, who visited Buryatia in 1900:

In wrestling there are two parts: the first is the manœuvring for advantage in the hold; this requires time, perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes are occupied before the opponents grapple and close in the conflict. Very often the wrestling itself does not last as long as the preliminary manœuvring for advantage.<sup>655</sup>

---

<sup>654</sup> Vladimir A. Fomin, “Vozrozhdaya traditsii,” *Agentstvo sporta*, No. 1, March 2006: p. 24.

<sup>655</sup> Curtin, *A Journey in Southern Siberia*, 51. Cf. also V. Parshin, *Poyezdka v zabaykal'skiy kray*, part one (Moskva: 1844), 61–62.

This is indeed how a bout in Buryat wrestling typically proceeds. Especially when the *bühe*, the cloth waist belt, is used—which, according to the present rules, is in cases when after five minutes neither of the wrestlers can achieve a win and therefore have to grip each other on the *bühe* and are not allowed to loosen that grip—the matter, despite they are now “close in the conflict,” indeed often “requires time.” The longest bout I personally witnessed lasted for 42 minutes! The joy of the winner, who finally could throw his opponent to the ground, was boundless as were the cheers of the crowd. Today Buryat traditional wrestling is perhaps more vibrant than ever.

## Chapter 4:

### *Sur kharbaan—Buryat Archery*

Buryat archery competitions historically played as important a role in Buryat society as Buryat wrestling, and today it too is flourishing. This chapter will describe in detail its origin, history, and present state.

#### **Buryat bows and arrows**

Archaeological data from various places in the world attest that man has been using the complex weapon of bow and arrow since the Upper Paleolithic Period. Most likely it did not appear first in one place from which it then spread over the world, but was independently invented by various people in different regions at different times, from about 35,000 to 8,000 BCE.<sup>656</sup> This is evidence of the generally already high cognitive and intellectual abilities of humans of that period, because for inventing this weapon the comprehension of fairly complex physical processes was necessary: the mechanical interplay of three quite different, nowhere in nature together occurring elements (a bow, a string, and an arrow), which makes use of a hidden force—elasticity.<sup>657</sup> The result was a tool, “the ballistic potential of which exceeded by many times a man’s physical possibilities.”<sup>658</sup> In its importance this (multiple) invention was equal to

---

<sup>656</sup> Aleksey P. Okladnikov, “K voprosu o proiskhozhdenii i meste luka v istorii kul’tury,” in *Kratkiye soobshcheniya o dokladakh i polevykh issledovaniyakh instituta istorii material’noy kul’tury*, issue 5 (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1940), 17; Khanda-Tsyren D. Gombozhapova, “Istoriya izobreteniya, izgotovleniya i konstruktsiya luka,” in *Istoriko-kul’turnoye i sportivno-prikladnoye razvitiye natsional’nykh vidov sporta v Rossii: opyt regionov: materialy Vserossiyskoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, ed. M. D. Gulyayev (Yakutsk: FGOU VPO “ChGIFKiS”, 2009), 63–65.

<sup>657</sup> Okladnikov, “K voprosu o proiskhozhdenii i meste luka v istorii kul’tury,” 18; Gombozhapova, “Istoriya izobreteniya, izgotovleniya i konstruktsiya luka,” 63.

<sup>658</sup> Viktor A. Mikhaylov, *Oruzhiye i dospekhi buryat* (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’stvo ONTs “Sibir”, 1993), 12, translation mine.

the taming of fire or to the later invention of agriculture, as it was the one which made the supply of game—that is, of food—steady and reliable long before the Neolithic revolution.<sup>659</sup>

Although the shooting of arrows with bows was almost universally practiced since that early period of human cultural evolution, further developments, improvements and refinements of this weapon did not occur at the same pace everywhere, rather the contrary. In the New World—if we leave the most recent decades aside, of course—and in Africa few improvements were made, at least in comparison with those achieved in Eurasia. The improvements invented in Asia surpassed those of European bow makers for millennia. In particular, it was the *composite bow*, i.e. a bow that is made up of *different* materials, which outperformed the simple European wooden bows by far, including the English longbows well known from the legendary Robin Hood. If he would have needed to compete with a Mongolian archer of his time, it, without any doubt, would have turned out as a very profound disappointment for him. Mongolian bows of the medieval time period, and especially those from the Baikal region, had a range twice as far as English longbows, yet still released the arrow much more smoothly.<sup>660</sup> And they had this superiority, even though they were much shorter and lighter and therefore far easier to handle than the clunky European longbows.

In the development of this exceptional weapon, the Baikal region has most likely played a crucial role, as there, in Neolithic graves from the first half of the second millennium BCE, the oldest bone plates of the lathy shape characteristic of those glued on the wooden stems of Asian composite bows were found. In the following Bronze Age, such bows spread all over the steppe zone from Mongolia to Kazakhstan, which we know, because they—easily recognizable by their characteristic multi-curved shape—were often depicted in petroglyphs and on the above mentioned ‘deer stones’ in this area from the second half of the second millennium BCE to the first half of the first millennium BCE.<sup>661</sup>

---

<sup>659</sup> Gombozhapova, “Istoriya izobreteniya, izgotovleniya i konstruktsiya luka,” 63; Okladnikov, “K voprosu o proiskhozhdenii i meste luka v istorii kul’tury,” 20; Boris D. Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan (Tri igry muzhey)* (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel’svo, 1993), 10–11.

<sup>660</sup> “Natsiya luka i strel” (interview with Buryat bow making enthusiast Dylgyr Tsyrendorzhiev), *Nomerodin*, August 29, 2007.

<sup>661</sup> Yuliy S. Khudyakov, “Evolutsiya slozhnopostavnogo luka u kochevnikov Tsentral’noy Azii,” in *Voyennoye delo naseleniya yuga Sibiri i Dal’nego Vostoka*, ed. V. E. Medvedev and Yuliy S. Khudyakov (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1993), 107–8; Andrey A. Badmayev, *Remesla aginskikh buryat* (Novosibirsk: Institut arkhologii i etnografii SO RAN, 1997), 75–76; Radzhana D. Dugarova, “Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik ‘Eryn gurban naadan’ (‘Tri igrishcha muzhey’) i ego mesto v kul’ture buryat,” avtoreferat dissertatsii (Moskva: 2004), 19.

It probably was indeed in the Baikal region where the development of this successful weapon originated, as this is also corroborated by its geographic location almost in the middle of Asia and in the transition zone between the taiga and the steppe. Natural conditions there, as described above, are highly diverse: thick forests alternate with open grass lands, cold winters with hot summers, and the general low humidity is frequently contrasted by heavy rain falls; and the big lake as well as the high mountains make for often gusty winds. And also culturally—as likewise described above—this region has been diverse, as throughout history forest people and steppe people intermixed there. These broadened human intellectual resources in conjunction with the manifold challenges the natural environment brought about for archery, must have inspired inventive minds, especially in times *before* the introduction of animal herding, when *hunting* was of the utmost importance for survival.<sup>662</sup>

The ‘Baikalian’ Bronze Age bow was further improved by the Huns and thus, like they themselves, also their *Hunnish bow*—as it is referred to in the literature—spread all over the Eurasian steppe belt. Thereafter, the various Turkic cultures and the Mongols—both dominating in the same huge area at their times—refined the weapon further (*Turkestan bow*, *Mongolian bow*).<sup>663</sup> Among the Mongols it was, again, the ‘Baikalians’—that is, by then, already the (proto-)Buryat tribes—who excelled everyone in this particular endeavor. I will describe further below why and how, but let me, for better understanding, first explain the principle matter in all of this, which is what it essentially was that made these North, Inner and Middle Asian bows so much better than all the others.

Above all bow makers there, for millennia earlier than their European and other colleagues, understood that “the effectiveness of bows [does] not primarily depend on their method of construction, but on the *material[s]* used when building them.”<sup>664</sup> Animal sinews and animal horn—in addition to bone, the two materials most often used by them for increasing the elasticity and strength of their bows—have, for instance, vastly better physical properties conducive for bow making than wood. Sinew has a tear resistance four times higher and horn a break resistance

---

<sup>662</sup> Cf. Gombozhapova, “Istoriya izobreteniya, izgotovleniya i konstruktsiya luka,” 66. See also Bruno Adler, “Die Bogen Nordasiens,” *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* 15 (1902): 4.

<sup>663</sup> Dugarova, “Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik ‘Eryn gurban naadan’,” 19; Felix von Luschan, “Zusammengesetzte und verstärkte Bogen,” *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 31 (1899): 227.

<sup>664</sup> Gábor Szöllősy, “Mennyivel voltak jobb íjaik a honfoglaló magyaroknak, mint a korabeli Európa más népeinek? *Keletkutatás* (1995/ősz): 42, addition and emphasis mine.



two times higher than wood.<sup>665</sup> In addition to these basic materials, Asian bow makers also employed animal skins, guts, cartilage, swim bladders, birch bark and more. All these materials improved the properties of their bows. By contrast, European bow makers focused in their efforts of improving the effectiveness of their products almost exclusively on *construction* characteristics.<sup>666</sup> In particular, they made their bows' *limbs* longer and longer. The limbs—in (English) bow terminology—are the two sections of a bow, above and below the handle section, which bend when the string is drawn. English bowyers made them longer for increasing the leverage. They, however, had to make them also thicker so that they could withstand the increased stress put on them by this higher leverage. As a result these bows became impractically long and heavy, thus inconvenient for transportation, and on top of all this the heavy vibration of their long limbs did transmit to the arrows when shot, which, of course, impaired the accuracy of the weapon considerably. Asian bow makers, by contrast, achieved the exact opposite by their ingenious invention of the *reflex bow*. These were bows, the limbs of which, when the string was unclamped, pointed *away* from the archer, that is, bended into the *opposite* direction of when the bow was strung. Thus, these bows, when strung, had a much higher spring *preload*—i.e. *stored* energy—in their limbs. This *higher* energy stored in the bow itself allowed keeping its limbs short, as *less* lever forces were necessary for creating such a bow's draw weight. These lesser lever forces, in turn, allowed for building thinner limbs, which not only made them lighter, but also reduced their vibration, when the arrow was released. All this resulted in short and light, thus very handy bows, but which were nonetheless very strong and had a high accuracy.<sup>667</sup> Robin Hood surely would have dreamed of such a bow.

Real historic people for whom such *composite reflex bows*—as they are classified in the subject literature—were part of their everyday life were the Buryats. Among the *Mongolian bows*, which all belong to this category, the Buryat bows were the shortest, with an average

---

<sup>665</sup> Khanda-Tsyren D. Gombozhapova and Stepan V. Kalmykov, *Strel'ba iz luka: istoriya i sovremennost'* (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2009), 45–46; Dashi-Nima R. Erdyniyev, "Izgotovleniya buryat-mongol'skogo luka," in *Pervyy mergen Buryatii*, ed. S. D. Ochirov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'skiy dom "Buryaad unen", 2005), 49.

<sup>666</sup> In a *literal* sense some European bow makers of the Middle Ages and even of prehistoric times did in fact build composite bows as well, but they only glued two sticks of different types of wood together, thus were not using any of the various other (better) materials Asian bow makers used. See Luschan, "Zusammengesetzte und verstärkte Bogen," 226.

<sup>667</sup> Gombozhapova and Kalmykov, *Strel'ba iz luka: istoriya i sovremennost'*, 45–46.

string length of just about four and a half to five feet.<sup>668</sup> Thus they were light and handy—still very strong though<sup>669</sup>—and released the arrow very smoothly, which helped the Buryat archers shoot with their legendary pinpoint accuracy. Particularly well suited were these handy bows, of course, for horseback archery<sup>670</sup>—the one predominantly practiced by the Buryats, as they both hunting and warfare almost exclusively carried out on horseback. This, of course, was also the case for all other Mongols and for all the steppe nomads preceding them too. The ‘equestrian way of life,’ which they conducted for millennia, and which distinguished them from European and other settled people, stimulated the development of smaller and lighter bows throughout their history. The Buryats contributed to this developmental process by providing their knowledge of living—and surviving—in *other* environments than steppe.

What in particular constituted a Buryat bow and how it was made is, as a matter of fact, a question which cannot be uniformly answered because Buryat bows were custom-made for every individual archer. However, when looking at the Buryat bows preserved in museums—most of them dating from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century—and at the few bows stemming from that same time period, which are occasionally still used today, and by using available historic as well as contemporary ethnographic data, these bows show sufficient common features, so that one can describe a *typical* Buryat bow and how it was made.

Among the Buryats bow making—and that of arrows too—was men’s work,<sup>671</sup> and indeed all men were expected to have the necessary knowledge and skills until late into the nineteenth century.<sup>672</sup> However, because a wealth of experience, a passion for arduous detailed work, and the devotion of a considerable amount of time were necessary for making good bows and arrows, specialists emerged early on. These were usually elderly—that is, experienced—men who were

---

<sup>668</sup> The bows themselves were not much longer: from five to five and a half feet. Adler, “Die Bogen Nordasiens,” 14–15, 24; Badmayev, *Remesla aginskikh buryat*, 75; Taras V. Plakhotnichenko, “Buryatskiy luk” ([www.atarn.org/mongolian/buryat\\_bow\\_r.htm](http://www.atarn.org/mongolian/buryat_bow_r.htm), accessed January 12, 2014).

<sup>669</sup> Vladimir A. Fomin, *Ocherki istorii fizicheskoy kul’tury v Buryatii* (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2003), 15.

<sup>670</sup> Szöllösy, “Mennyivel voltak jobb íjaik a honfoglaló magyaroknak,” 42; Erdyniyev, “Izgotovleniya buryat-mongol’skogo luka,” 47.

<sup>671</sup> See Mikhail Tatarinov in Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, ed., *Opisaniye o bratskikh tatarakh, sochinennoye morskogo korabel’nogo flota shtyurmanom ranga kapitana Mikhailom Tatarinovym* (Ulan-Ude: Tipografiya Minkul’tury BMASSR, 1958), 32; Klements and Khangalov, “Obshchestvennyye okhoty u severnykh buryat,” 69.

<sup>672</sup> Tugulder Toboyev, “Proshlaya istoriya khorinskikh i aginskikh buryat [1863],” in *Buryatskiye letopisi*, ed. Shirap B. Chimitdorzhiev and Tsymzhit P. Vanchikova (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskiy institut obshchestvennykh nauk SO RAN, 1995), 16–17.

held in high regard for their superb bows and therefore asked by many to manufacture bows for them too.<sup>673</sup> It is mostly these masters' high quality products—as family heirlooms passed on from generation to generation and eventually often given to museums—which survived the times and we therefore can study today. In the following paragraphs, I will describe how they were made. I will draw on three types of sources: (1) information from published literature,<sup>674</sup> (2) my personal inspections of Buryat bows in museums and *in situ*,<sup>675</sup> (3) information which some of the very few Buryats, who still know (or knew) how to make (or at least how to repair) traditional Buryat bows and arrows, have shared with me during my research in the past two

---

<sup>673</sup> Dandar D. Damsaranov, Buryat bow expert and repairman, personal communication, Aga-Khangil (Aga Buryat region), June 1996.

<sup>674</sup> Dmitriy N. Anuchin, “O drevnem luke i strelakh,” *Trudy V arkheologicheskogo s'yezda v Tiflise 1881* (Moskva: 1887), 381–82; Klements and Khangalov, “Obshchestvennyye okhoty u severnykh buryat,” 69–70; Matvey N. Khangalov, “Neskol'ko dannyykh dlya kharakteristiki byta severnykh buryat,” in *Sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1 (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004), 171; Bruno Adler, “Der nordasiatische Pfeil,” *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* 14, supplement (1901): 30–32; idem, “Die Bogen Nordasiens,” 3–25; S.-D. Shagdaron and B.-D. Ochirov, “Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat,” *Zapiski Imperatorskago Russkago Geograficheskago obshchestva po otdeleniyu etnografii* 34 (1909): 475; N. Shornikov, “Metkaya strela,” *Fizkul'tura i sport* 10 (1951): 35; Iosif Ye. Tugutov, *Material'naya kul'tura buryat* (Ulan-Ude: BKNII SO AN SSSR, 1958), 39–42; Yefgeniy M. Zalkind (ed.), *Ocherki istorii kul'tury Buryatii* (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1972), 158; Nikolay Yan'kov, “Prazdnik luka,” *Nedelya*, no. 19 (1973): p. 23; M. Govorkov, “True to Age-Old Traditions,” in *National Folk Sports in the USSR*, ed. Yuri Lukashin (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980), 87; Mikhaylov, *Oruzhiye i dospekhi buryat*, 15–25; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 10–15; Genin-Darma Natsov, *Materialy po istorii i kul'ture buryat*, part 1 (Ulan-Ude: BNTS SO RAN, 1995), 33; Badmayev, *Remesla aginskikh buryat*, 74–75; Kseniya M. Gerasimova, Galina R. Galdanova and Galina N. Ochirova, *Traditsionnaya kul'tura buryat* (Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2000), 104; S. P. Dorzhiyeva, “Strel'ba iz luka kak sotsiokul'turnyy fenomen buryatskoy kul'tury,” in *Fenomenologiya traditsionnosti i sovremennosti*, ed. Lyubov' L. Abayeva (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2001), 143; Erdyniyev, “Izgotovleniya buryat-mongol'skogo luka,” 47–49; Viktor A. Mikhaylov, *Traditsionnyye promysly buryat: okhota, rybolovstvo (XVII – nachalo XX veka)* (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2006), 51–73; Ayuna Dashiyeveva, “Traditsionnaya sportivnaya triada: istoki prazdnika,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 6; Ol'ga Ubeyeva, “Surkharban. Strel'ba iz luka,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 28; Vladimir A. Fomin, “Narodnyye vidy sporta buryat—strel'ba iz luka i konnyye skachki,” in *Razvitiye sporta vysshikh dostizheniy i fizkul'turnogo obrazovaniya v regionakh RF: istoriya, traditsiya, innovatsiya: materialy Vserossiyskoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, ed. R. I. Platonova (Yakutsk: Izdatel'stvo YaNTs SO RAN, 2009), 384; Plakhotnichenko, “Buryatskiy luk”.

<sup>675</sup> I could inspect the Buryat bows and arrows kept in the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Kunstkamera) and the Russian Museum of Ethnography in Saint Petersburg as well as several bows in local history museums in Buryatia, the Irkutsk Province, and the Trans-Baikal Territory. I also could take a look at a few old Buryat bows, which were used by Buryat archers at *Surkharbans*, the traditional Buryat sports holidays I visited during my field research trips. Furthermore, I am one of the few people who own such a bow, because I was luckily able to purchase one at some point during my research.

decades.<sup>676</sup> This description is necessary, because it is these bows and arrows which the participants of traditional Buryat archery competitions are expected to use still today.

The wooden stem of the bow had to be made first. It was usually, but not always, crafted from birch wood,<sup>677</sup> ideally without any knotholes, about an inch wide and about three eighths of an inch thick, and of whatever length one wanted the bow to become. For an adult the bow length was between five and five and a half feet. It could consist of just one piece of wood, but for better, more elastic bows, five to seven separate pieces were dovetailed and glued together—a work which required meticulous precision.

The next step was to glue horn plates on the *face* or *belly* side of the bow stem's limbs, i.e. on the side which faces the string when the bow is strung. For that, plates made from large and long horns like that of moose, elk, ibex, khainag (a hybrid between the yak and the domestic cattle), or buffalo were preferred, because ideally only one long horn plate should be glued on each limb of the bow. When the bow makers did not have such long horns—which frequently happened, as those were always rare<sup>678</sup>—they used plates made from horn of domestic cattle, which however were shorter, thus several pieces of them had to be glued on each limb of the bow. In any case, the horn had to be cooked in water first for softening it, as only this allowed cutting it cleanly as well as precisely to the needed sizes of the plates. Then these plates needed to be finished by rasping and, before they were glued on the wooden stem, to be heated again—this time over fire and bringing them up to 250 degrees Fahrenheit—for making them sufficiently pliant. Then the glue was applied and the stem and the first horn plate were firmly clamped together between two wooden planks. It took only about fifteen minutes until the adhesive bond held and one could repeat this procedure for the next horn plate. This was possible because of the very adhesive glues the bow makers used. These glues were either made from fish—most often Baikal sturgeons—by decocting (boiling) their bladders, stomachs, skins, cartilages, or bones, or from doing the same with skins from reindeer or lean cows.

---

<sup>676</sup> These were aforementioned Dandar D. Damsaranov (see footnote 673); many-times Buryat archery champion Dashi-Nima R. Erdyniyev; former physics teacher, fine artist, and outstanding Buryat archer Tsyren-Dorzhi N. Magakov; and current physics teacher and Buryat bow making enthusiast Dylgyr Tsyrendorzhiyev.

<sup>677</sup> Other kinds of wood, which were occasionally used, were bamboo and maple, although both of them could not be found anywhere near, but had to be procured by means of long-distance trade.

<sup>678</sup> Like the special kinds of wood sometimes used for the bow stem (see previous footnote) these horns also had often to be procured often by means of trade. Thus, bow making was also a mainspring of regional as well as far-distance trading activities.

Such glue was also used for affixing bone plates to the stem at its handle section and at its two straight, stiff ends, each about six to eight inches long. These ends, which are called *khichir* in Buryat, point at an angle slightly to the opposite direction of the bow's bending (or *curve*), thus forward or, in other words, *away* from the archer. Bone plates were used as support for these parts of the bow, because these were the parts which had to withstand the highest mechanical forces and/or should not bend when the bow was drawn. For that reason in some cases the *khichir*-ends, or "siyahs", as such stiffened ends of a bow are called in the subject literature, were made solely of bone (or at least their end parts).<sup>679</sup> Into both of them often *two* string notches were grooved—one at the very tip (or close to it) and the other in a distance of about one half-inch from there. This was done for having two possible positions for mounting the string and thus varying its tension and thereby that of the bow as well, which was useful, because the bows of course reacted to weather conditions, in particular to temperature and humidity.<sup>680</sup>

For the next step, it was also crucial to have good glue like one of those mentioned above at hand. Now dried sinews had to be glued on the outside of the wooden stem, i.e. on the bow's *back*, which was what made for their great elasticity. For this purpose, sinews from wild animals such as moose, elk, reindeer, and roe deer seemed to have been slightly preferred over such from domestic animals. However, sinews from bulls and oxen were also well-liked, and also those from horses were sometimes used. It was important that they were long, which is why, most often, sinews from the backs of the animals were used. This phase of the bow making was the most time consuming. First the sinews had to be dried, and then separated into their finest fibers, and those then cleaned, smoothed, and flattened. Then these thin fibers had to be glued *singly*, i.e. one *after* the other as well as *on* the other, but between each time the glue had to dry completely, which took up to two and a half weeks *every time*. As no less than 20 to 25 layers of such sinew fibers had to be applied for achieving the necessary over-all thickness of this sinew ply of about one quarter-inch ('as thick as a thumb' as the Buryat bowyers say), this procedure could take a whole year.

---

<sup>679</sup> Siyahs are a further development of the *recurve*, the bending of a bow's ends to the opposite direction of that of its limbs. Because siyahs are straight, the levers do not become *steadily* longer when the bow is drawn (which happens with recurve bows), but, after the levers remain short in the first phase of the draw, they become longer *instantaneously*, which makes the rest of the draw feel soft and thus the release of the arrow smoother.

<sup>680</sup> Basically, the warmer the temperature and the higher the humidity, the weaker a bow became and vice versa.

After this time-consuming work had been finally completed, this sinew ply and the sides of the wooden stem were coated with birch bark, in order to protect them from moisture. For the horn and bone plates on the bow's belly, this was not necessary. These surfaces were, however, polished to a sheen and at places often further beautified with ornaments or symbols either painted on them or made by pokerwork. The latter was also often done on the birch bark on the bows' backs. Frequently it was sun symbols—including swastikas—which adorned Buryat bows.

The *backwards* bent shape or *flexion*—typical and, as described above, crucial for *reflex* bows—the Buryat bows could take by themselves when the sinew fibers were applied on their backs, as they in the course of this long procedure slowly contracted and therefore often bent the bow backwards. Another method, which seems to have been more often applied, was clamping the bow into a bent frame and keeping it there at a dry place and at room temperature for about another year. Thus altogether, the manufacturing of a Buryat bow took usually no less than two years time, often even more.

For making the bow string, the Buryat master bowyers used various raw materials. These were raw and tanned skins from wild animals as well as from cows, horses, and camels, and guts from sheep. Whatever was chosen was cut into long strips, which were first twisted and then stretched by hanging them up with weights on their bottom ends and then finished by grinding them with wool to make them perfectly round. Depending on which particular material the strings were made of, they were suited for certain weather conditions. Strings made of guts from sheep were, for instance, well-suited for hot weather, whereas strings made from raw horse hide were best-suited for freezing temperatures. For knotting the nooses of the strings, a special knot, called *toonto*, was tied, which was absolutely secure, but could nonetheless be easily unraveled.

For preventing the string to come off when the bow was shot and preventing the bow from swinging into its resting position, that is—being a *reflex* bow—into the *opposite* direction of that when strung, wooden bars were affixed on the bow's belly on both sides at the end of the limb and the beginning of the *siyah*, i.e. in a distance of about six to eight inches from the ends of the bow. These bars were about one inch long, one half-inch wide, and one inch high. Into these “string bridges” or “runs,” as they are called in the literature, or *tebkhe* in Buryat, evenly rounded grooves of a central depth of about one half-inch were rasped, into which the *toonto*-knots of the string perfectly fit and where they were sitting when the bow was strung. Thus, when the bow was shot, the two *tebkhe* reliably caught the string. Such string bridges were a unique feature of

all *Mongolian bows*, which contributed to making them the unfailing weapon the Mongols (and Buryats) needed for their style of (very successful, as we know) warfare and hunting.

As the best bow is of no use without good arrows, the Buryats also devoted great attention to their manufacture, and master *mohoshin*—arrow makers—were held in the same high regard as were renowned bowyers. First and foremost, the arrows of course had to be absolutely straight, but they also had to have a specific flexibility.<sup>681</sup> Thus, just like for the bows, wood that was neither too hard nor too soft also had to be used for the arrows. Birch and pine wood fulfilled these criterion; hence, these woods were used for making arrows. A lathe and special knives were used to achieve perfect straightness and roundness. The arrows were made between 30 and 40 inches long and about three-eighths of an inch thick. At their ends they were, however, made slightly thicker and often wrapped with dried sinew fiber, and a nock for the string was grooved. All this helped the archer with holding and fixating the arrow in the needed position when he or she drew the string.

Most of the arrows were fletched—the majority of them three-fletched, but some also four-fletched. For this, feathers of predator birds like eagles, hawks, and falcons were preferred, but also those of swans, geese, cranes, and others were used. Tail feathers were preferred over wing feathers; however, both of them were used. It was important that they be *hard* feathers, because soft ones do not withstand the high air friction forces an arrow is exposed to when shot. The feather vanes were carefully cut off the shaft of the feather, and thus separated. Then these feather halves were glued on the arrow (thus once again the strong glues the Buryat bowyers made came in very useful). This work, of course, required highest precision. All three or four feather halves had to be of the same kind and size—about eight to nine inches long and five-

---

<sup>681</sup> Arrows for archery need a certain flexibility, because of the so called ‘archer’s paradox,’ which—in simplified terms and in regard to pre-modern bows like the Mongolian—is that a *stiff* arrow leaves the bow sideways and can in no way shot targeted, because the arrow’s head and its end are not lying in one plane (because for that the arrow would have to go through the middle of the bow handle); a slightly *flexible* arrow however leaves the bow straight. Why it does this and what exactly happens with such an arrow when shot—i.e. what explains the paradox—is a complicated interaction between the string, the arrow, and the bow, which causes a flexible arrow to vibrate sideways in *equal* amplitudes from the moment, when the archer releases the string. These equal vibration amplitudes make for an over-all straight flight, however in a wavy line, at least in the first 50 to 100 feet of the flight. This was discovered only in the second quarter of the twentieth century, when photographic methods became available, which allowed to make still images of an object moving with such high velocity as an arrow when released from a bow (see Paul E. Klopsteg, “Physics of Bows and Arrows,” *American Journal of Physics* 11, 4 (August 1943): 175–92). Archers of earlier times, including the Buryats, therefore did not know *why* the arrows must not be too stiff, but their experience enabled them to nonetheless manufacture perfectly suited arrows.

eighths to six-eighths of an inch high—and had to be glued onto the arrow's shaft precisely parallel to its axis, in equal distances from one another and, of course, in the same direction. The latter made for an important effect: as the barbs of bird feathers are always slightly bent in one direction, this caused the arrows to rotate around their axes when flying, which stabilized their flight, and thus improved their accuracy.

The Buryats made and used many different types of arrowhead, because different purposes—warfare, big game hunting, small game hunting, sport competitions—required different arrows. Most of their heads were made of bone or iron, and in some cases of both materials. Of the latter type, the whistling arrows, which were used in both warfare and hunting, are the best known examples. Such an arrow had an iron blade, and behind it a hollow ball or polyhedron of bone carved with holes, which produced a loud whistling or howling sound when flying. Of the arrowheads used by the Buryats solely in warfare, the most frightening one was probably the *saran sebe*—a sharp, crescent-shaped, iron blade mounted horizontally on the arrow. If such an arrow hit a person in the neck or throat, this person could be beheaded (which, in fact, was the intention). By contrast, an arrowhead, which was intended for *not* causing cuts and bloody wounds, was the *bolsu*, a blunt head of the shape of a miniature barrel made of bone or wood. Arrows with such heads were used for hunting small animals in order to not harm their fur; and they were—and still are—also used in the archery competitions that are part of the focus of this study.

### **Buryat real, mythical, and ritual archery**

As good archery skills were of utmost importance in peace and war times alike, Buryat boys and girls were familiarized with bows and arrows already around an age between three and five and started actively practicing archery not much later.<sup>682</sup> This is, for instance, reported by Mikhail Tatarinov, a “helmsman in the rank of a captain” of the “marine sea fleet,” but who nonetheless visited the inland Buryat region for a quite considerable period of time in the mid-eighteenth

---

<sup>682</sup> Gerasimova, Galdanova and Ochirova, *Traditsionnaya kul'tura buryat*, 105; S. P. Dorzhiyeva, “Strel'ba iz luka kak sotsiokul'turnyy fenomen buryatskoy kul'tury,” 143; Ol'ga Ubeyeva, “Surkharban. Strel'ba iz luka,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 29.



century and left behind very detailed descriptions of Buryat customs and everyday life.<sup>683</sup> At an age of nine or ten, good marksmanship was already widespread among Buryat children, and by no later than the age of fourteen all boys needed also to know how to make a bow. For achieving all this, practicing archery—including horseback archery—was a very frequent activity among the Buryats, and not only among the young.<sup>684</sup> To be a good archer was one of the ‘nine sciences of real men,’ that is, of the skills they were required to have.<sup>685</sup>

Together the described excellent equipment and the frequent practice from their earliest years made many Buryats truly outstanding archers. This, as mentioned above, gave the Russian Cossacks a hard time in their battles with Buryat warriors. Later, after peace was established, Russian and other travelers to the region, as well as ethnographers, were full of admiration for the Buryat archers’ skills. They reported that these fabulous marksmen could hit a flying bird or, while riding a horse at full gallop, a running hare or an arrow stuck in the ground, and many more nearly miraculous stunts.<sup>686</sup>

For that reason alone it is no wonder that archery among the Buryats kept its importance for both economic—i.e. hunting—activities and for military purposes for a long time even after firearms had appeared.<sup>687</sup> This, however, had also two more reasons. The first was that until the beginning of the nineteenth century firearms did not hold a decided advantage over bows—and especially not over such excellent bows like the Buryat ones—and in particular not for *mounted* hunters and warriors, which both the Buryats were, as we know.<sup>688</sup> The muzzle-loaders and also

---

<sup>683</sup> See Tatarinov in Rumyantsev, *Opisaniye o bratskikh tatarakh*, 19.

<sup>684</sup> Tugulder Toboyev, “Proshlaya istoriya khorinskikh i aginskikh buryat [1863],” in *Buryatskie letopisi*, ed. Shirap B. Chimtdorzhiev and Tsymzhit P. Vanchikova (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskiy institut obshchestvennykh nauk SO RAN, 1995), 16–17; Gerasimova, Galdanova and Ochirova, *Traditsionnaya kul’tura buryat*, 105.

<sup>685</sup> Dorzhiyeva, “Strel’ba iz luka kak sotsiokul’turnyy fenomen buryatskoy kul’tury,” 143. The other eight ‘sciences’ were to be able (1) to wrestle, (2) to break a bone from a sheep’s back with bare hands, (3) to plait a whip from eight leather straps, (4) to plait a three leg hobble, (5) to be a good rider, (6) a good hunter, (7) a skilled craftsman, and (8) to be skilled in smithing. Yuriy B. Randalov, E. O. Dobolova, I. A. Malanov and N. B. Dondubon, *Maloye selo Buryatii: shkola, intellektual’noye i fizicheskoye razvitiye detey: opyt sotsiolog i sotsiopsikholog* (Ulan-Ude, BNTs SO RAN, 1993), 49; A. S. Sagaleyev, K. V. Baldayev, A. Ye. Pavlov and Vladimir A. Fomin, “Sistema “devyat’ nauk muzhchiny”—traditsionnoye sredstvo trudovogo i fizicheskogo vospitaniya buryat,” in “*Biyeiyn tamir, sport-shinechleliyn arga zam*” *Onol-praktikiyn olon ulsyn бага khurlyn tezisiyn emkhetgel* (Ulaanbaatar: 1997), 9.

<sup>686</sup> Pëtr E. Kulakov and I. A. Molodykh, *Ilyustrirovannoye opisaniye byta sel’skago naseleniya Irkutskoy gubernii* (Sankt-Peterburg: 1896), 180; Ol’ga Ubeyeva, “Surkharban. Strel’ba iz luka,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 29.

<sup>687</sup> Ubeyeva, “Surkharban. Strel’ba iz luka,” 27.

<sup>688</sup> Bashkuyev, *Buryaty: traditsii i kul’tura*, 52.

the muskets of the seventeenth and eighteenth century were very heavy (20 pounds and more), and reloading them took no less than one minute (and on *horseback* probably even longer), whereas a Buryat-Mongolian bow was light and handy and one could shoot at least three, and a skilled archer even up to twelve arrows per minute.<sup>689</sup> Also regarding range and punch these bows were not a bit worse than the guns in those days, and regarding accuracy they often still exceeded them,<sup>690</sup> as, for instance, one reported competition between two gentlemen in England in 1792 shows, in which one was shooting with a rifle and the other with an English longbow, and which the latter could win,<sup>691</sup> although using a type of bow, which, as we know, was surely not the best of that time.

The second reason why Buryats did not use firearms must not go unmentioned. This was that the Tsarist government prohibited them from doing so. Only in the second half of the eighteenth century this ban was lifted for the very practical, fiscal, reason that the Buryats were further able to pay, i.e. to ‘shoot,’ their fur taxes.<sup>692</sup> The Buryat Cossacks, however, protected the border of the empire with just bows, arrows, lances, and sabers for more than another half a century, until about 1840.<sup>693</sup> For cavalry forces, and especially for such excellent horseback archers like the Buryats, these were still the most suitable arms even at that time. For hunting in its ‘*commercial*’ form, that is, for acquiring enough furs to satisfy Russian tax collectors’ appetites, improved rifles were by then used in almost all cases. But in their *zegete aba*, large traditional communal hunts, the Buryats continued to use also bows and arrows. In the course of the nineteenth century, these hunts, however, adopted more and more the character of a pastime activity.<sup>694</sup>

The other archery related pastime activity, which was popular among the Buryats from times immemorial, was their target shooting *competitions*. These shooting competitions constituted for the Buryats an excellent incentive for exercising, hence improving, archery skills. Thus, this was

---

<sup>689</sup> A. Z. Khamarkhanov, “O kul’ture i bytie mongol’skikh narodov v trude N. Vitsena “Severnaya i Vostochnaya Tartariya”,” in *Kul’turno-bytovyye traditsii buryat i mongolov* (Ulan-Ude: Institut obshchestvennykh nauk SO AN SSSR, 1988), 154; Myasnikov and Dugarov, *Voyennoye delo kochevnikov Baykal’skogo regiona*, 115.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

<sup>691</sup> The two gentlemen were Dr. Higgins and Mr. Glynn and they were shooting “at a target four feet in diameter, one hundred yards distant, at twenty-one shots each [and] the score stood: Bow, 15 hits, Gun, 12 hits.” *The Archer’s Complete Guide or, Instructions for the Use of the Long Bow. By an Expert* (New York: Peck & Snyder, 1878), 7.

<sup>692</sup> Gerasimova, Galdanova and Ochirova, *Traditsionnaya kul’tura buryat*, 29.

<sup>693</sup> Gombozhapova and Kalmykov, *Strel’ba iz luka: istoriya i sovremennost’*, 38.

<sup>694</sup> Gerasimova, Galdanova and Ochirova, *Traditsionnaya kul’tura buryat*, 30–31.

certainly a major reason why they were organized. They, however, have deep ideological, that is cultic, magic, and religious roots too. Let us therefore leave for a moment—to speak with Marx—the historical economic and social *base* archery had among the Buryats, i.e. its necessity for hunting and fighting, and see how it was (and still is) represented in their society's *superstructure*, i.e. in their symbolic culture, myths, legends, and religious beliefs.

The great importance archery, and everything related with it, had for the Buryats is—to begin with the linguistic sphere—reflected in the figurative or even aphoristic usages of archery related terms in Buryat everyday language. For instance *homo*, a widely used Buryat word for “arrow,” which, as described above, has to be absolutely straight, is therefore also used figuratively to mean straight in the sense of “honest.” Thus an ‘honest person’ is a *homo sed'kheltey khiin*, a “person with straight (like an arrow) thoughts.” The bow appears, for example, in the idiom *nomoo khuryaakha*—“to put the bow away”—meaning, ‘to become peaceful,’ ‘to restore peace,’ but also in *nomoo nyuukha*—“to hide the bow”—meaning, to do something on the sly.<sup>695</sup> In general there are many terms in the Buryat language that are related to archery and many to wrestling too and, of course, to horses and everything connected with them, including racing as well. However, as for *other* sports, only very few genuine Buryat terms exist.<sup>696</sup> This reflects the centuries-long prevalence, if not exclusiveness, these sports have had among the Buryats.

In the rich Buryat folk literature—consisting of heroic epics thousands of verses long, many tales and fables, and countless legends—the heroes of the stories frequently feature highly impressive archery skills. Indeed many of them bear the title *mergen*, which translates as “marksman.” *Shodoy mergen*, for instance, has, “from the distance of a day’s journey,” to first shoot an arrow through the center bores of three wooden wheels, and then, with the second arrow, to shoot off the antler of a running elk and after that, with the third arrow, to hit a bird in mid-air, in order to get the khan’s daughter as his wife, and he succeeds in all of this.<sup>697</sup> That the

---

<sup>695</sup> See the respective word entries in the Buryat-Russian dictionary of Lubsan D. Shagdaron and Konstantin M. Cheremisov, *Buryaad-orod toli. Buryatsko-russkiy slovar'* (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2010) and also Plakhotnichenko, “Buryatskiy luk,” and B. Zh. Budayev, “Slozheniye sistemy buryatskoy sportivnoy terminologii,” in *Istoriya razvitiya mongol'skikh yazikov*, ed. Valentin I. Rassadin (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs SO RAN, 1999), 242.

<sup>696</sup> Budayev, “Slozheniye sistemy buryatskoy sportivnoy terminologii,” 242.

<sup>697</sup> Quoted in Radzhana D. Dugarova, “Traditsionnyye sportivnyye sostyazaniya ‘eryn gurban naadan’ (‘tri igry muzhey’) v folklоре buryat,” in *Baykal'skiye vstrechi – III: Kul'tury narodov Sibiri: Materialy III Mezhdunarodnogo nauchnogo simpoziuma*, vol. 1, ed. L. S. Dampilova (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'sko-poligraficheskiy kompleks VSGAKI, 2001), 163–64.

hero has to compete for his bride in such extraordinary archery feats as well as in a wrestling tournament and to have his horse ridden by a young boy or girl—like in the real Buryat horse races (see Chapter 5)—in a no less extraordinary, that is, very long, race, is a frequent motif in Buryat folk literature.<sup>698</sup> The other, no less frequent task the mythical heroes of these tales and epics must accomplish is to kill the various *mangud* (or *mangad* or *mangadkhay*)—monsters that relentlessly terrify people. In practically all cases the heroes first try to kill them in wrestling bouts, but those always end with a tie. Therefore they have to resort to their bows and, particularly, to their arrows.<sup>699</sup> Their arrows are, however, even better than those, which the mohoshin, the Buryat arrow makers, made. Here is one example, taken from one version of the Geser epos, which starts with Geser speaking to his arrow:

“Fly, fly, O my arrow, and break the spinal column beneath the Mangathai’s neck, break his right forearm, fall then upon his breast and whirl through his heart and lungs, cut them into small pieces, and come back to me.”

He whispered with such force to the arrow, that, from magic, red fire appeared on the bow where the arrow touched it, and little blue flames ran along the whole bowstring. He drew the arrow to the very head, drew it back until the bow was like half a circle, then let the arrow fly. It went straight to the Mangathai, struck his spinal column below the neck, broke his right arm, went into his left side and cut his heart and lungs into small pieces, killed him; then returned to Gesir Bogdo with a whistle, and went of itself into the quiver.<sup>700</sup>

In some cases the arrow has even such magic power that it acquires cognitive abilities, as the following example shows in which the hero, *Altin Shogoy*, needs to kill the one-eyed, “terribly poisonous” *Mogoi Khan*, but is told that to shoot an arrow at him “is terribly difficult,” because “[i]f it brings back even one drop of blood thou wilt die, without rescue.” Nonetheless,

Altin drew his bow, and aimed at Mogoi’s one eye.

“Bring not back a drop of blood, wipe thyself clean,” said Altin to the arrow.

---

<sup>698</sup> Ibid.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>700</sup> Jeremiah Curtin, *A Journey in Southern Siberia. The Mongols, their Religion and their Myths* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1909), 144–45.

The arrow went straight into the eye, and tore Mogoi Khan's head into many small pieces. The arrow did not return. It could not, it was bloody.<sup>701</sup>

It is important to mention that the heroes in the Buryat folk literature genres are by no means all male. In fact, quite frequently, they are heroines who anything but less successfully than their male colleagues fight the 'Mangathais', as they wrestle in truly Amazonian manner and have magic arrows too. One example is *Hanhai*, who wrestles with a Mangathai for nine days and nine nights before the Mangathai asks her finally to decide the matter by the use of arrows. From the arrow, which he shoots at her, Hanhai protects herself by turning into a hard stone. Then, after "[s]he became Hanhai again, [...] she sent a magic arrow" which "shivered the Mangathai into fragments, broke him into all pieces."<sup>702</sup> Thus, the folk stories palpably reflect the high position Buryat women had—and still have!—in both family life and the public sphere including warfighting, in which they participated as they did in the *zegete aba*, the large communal hunts, the Buryats used to frequently organize. Buryat women were at least as good archers as the men and often better than them, and they also were in no way inferior riders. Therefore, a bow and arrows, as well as a horse, were indispensable parts of a bride's dowry.<sup>703</sup>

As regards the Buryats' folk literature, the host of grisly monsters—who live in grandiose palaces, destroy the homelands of the heroes, rob both their livestock and people (and, of course, their wives too)—and, thus, the ferocious fights the heroes and the heroines fight with them, are, according to eminent researchers and analyzers of this literature, representations of the continuous clan feuds and tribal wars that the Buryats (like all Mongols) were engaged in for centuries on end. Just as in (that) real life, in which neither of the combatants was (at least in the long run) 'stronger' than the other, so in the tales and epics: the matter can never be decided with a wrestling match. Hence, the heroes and heroines have to resort to magic,<sup>704</sup> which is what the

---

<sup>701</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>703</sup> Matvey N. Khangalov, "Zegete-aba—oblava na zverey u drevnikh buryat," in Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1 (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004), 24; idem, "Yuridicheskiye obychai u buryat," in Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1 (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004), 158; idem, "Neskol'ko dannyykh dlya kharakteristiki byta severnykh buryat," 177; idem, "Moi predki," in Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1 (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004), 109 and 128; Klements and Khangalov, "Obshchestvennyye okhoty u severnykh buryat," 61; Vladimir A. Fomin, *Ocherki istorii fizicheskoy kul'tury v Buryatii* (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2003), 13.

<sup>704</sup> Dugarova, "Traditsionnyye sportivnyye sostyazaniya 'eryn gurban naadan'," 168–69.

(real) Buryats themselves did since times immemorial, and of which neither Buddhism nor Russian Orthodoxy and certainly not Soviet atheism could break them of. And it is no wonder that for them particularly arrows—their main ‘ammunition’ for most of their history!—have special magic power and therefore play crucial roles in their traditional beliefs and magical practices. One of those beliefs also appears in the epics and tales. This is that arrows represent the ‘soul’ of men,<sup>705</sup> that is, their life:

“I will show thee thy dwelling-place first,” answered Altin, “and then give thee a sign.”

After he had showed him a yurta aside, he gave him an arrow and said: “Keep this arrow carefully. If I die it will rot. If I live it will be as it is now.”<sup>706</sup>

This is why, when, in former times, after a trial, an arrow was broken over the convict’s head, this was practically tantamount to a death sentence, as a person, whose soul in this way was broken (i.e. killed), was considered to be ‘morally’ dead.<sup>707</sup> In turn, when Buryats took an oath, they did it under an arrow, which made it a solemn, firm, and long-living commitment.<sup>708</sup> Arrows also personified the souls of the future children of a newly married couple, wherefore a beautifully adorned *khehneg*—a special leather bag for storing arrows at home—with a number of arrows in it was always part of a bride’s dowry.<sup>709</sup> Thus arrows were believed to bear life-giving power as well as protective power against evil forces.<sup>710</sup> Shamans therefore used arrows in their magic rituals for scaring away evil spirits. Parents used small depictions of arrows for the

---

<sup>705</sup> Khangalov and Agapitov, “Materialy dlya izucheniya shamanstva,” 324.

<sup>706</sup> Curtin, *A Journey in Southern Siberia*, 239.

<sup>707</sup> Khangalov, “Zegete-aba,” 20; idem, “Yurisdicheskiye obychai u buryat,” 159; V. Mikhaylov, “Zametka po povodu perevoda vyrazheniya ‘zegete aba’—okhota na rossomakh v stat’e M. N. Khangalova i D. A. Klementsya ‘Obshchestvennyye okhoty u severnykh buryat’,” *Zhivaya starina* 1–2 (1913): 182.

<sup>708</sup> Khangalov, “Yurisdicheskiye obychai u buryat,” 148–149, 153.

<sup>709</sup> These the bride got in addition to the regular bow and arrows which, as stated, were also indispensable parts of her dowry (see above, p. 190). Dugarova, “Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik ‘Eryn gurban naadan’,” 20; Vladimir A. Fomin and Vadim V. Shokhirev, *Istoriya fizicheskoy kul’tury i sporta Buryatii do 1917 goda* (Irkutsk: Izdatel’stvo “Megaprint”, 2011), 19; Yelena G. Manushkina, *Svadebnyye obryady zapadnykh buryat v kontse XIX – nachele XX veka* (Irkutsk: Izdatel’stvo IP “Makarov S. Ye.”, 2001), 10.

<sup>710</sup> Nadezhda B. Dashiyeva, “Traditsionnyye obshchestvennyye prazdniki buryat: opyt istoriko-etnograficheskogo issledovaniya,” avtoreferat dissertatsii, Institut etnografii im. Miklukho-Maklaya AN SSSR (Moskva: Nauka, 1985), 10.

same purpose, that is, to scare away evil spirits from their babies;<sup>711</sup> and even *tengeri*, that is gods, were believed to use arrows for “beating” evil spirits.<sup>712</sup> Shamans also foretold the future by the flight of arrows;<sup>713</sup> and Buddhist lamas loaded arrows with their mantras with such magic power that they led them to wanted thieves.<sup>714</sup> Bows and arrows were often among the funerary goods for both ordinary mortals and shamans,<sup>715</sup> and they were sacrificed at *barisa-* or *obo-* sites—the sacrificial sites that Buryats believe to be also the homes of their protector spirits.<sup>716</sup> Thus, bows and arrows were considered holy objects and therefore treated with the highest respect or even worshipped. Arrows were sacrificed ribbons (by binding them onto the arrows) and it was—and actually still is—strictly forbidden to step over a bow.<sup>717</sup>

Such sacralization of bows and arrows is characteristic not only for the Buryats, but in general for the nomadic people of the Eurasian steppe belt. For most of them a strung bow represents their cosmology: the half-circle of the bow symbolizes the (vaulted) sky, the string the (flat) earth, and the arrow the world axis.<sup>718</sup> A widespread and age-old myth among all these people is that at one time, a second or even a third sun appeared in the sky, and thus it became very hot and everything started to scorch. Therefore, according to the myth, somebody tried to shoot down the superfluous sun(s) with a bow, usually failing at first, but eventually they or somebody else succeeded. It is possible that also *sur-kharban*, the name of the most widespread type of archery competitions among the Buryats, actually means “shooting at the sun,” because the word *sur*, which is how the targets in these competitions are called, may derive from “*surya*”, the Old Indo-Aryan (Vedic Sanskrit) word for sun. This is corroborated by the fact that the

---

<sup>711</sup> Khangalov and Agapitov, “Materialy dlya izucheniya shamanstva v Sibiri,” 293; Khangalov, “Novyye materialy o shamanstve u buryat,” 432 and 435; Dugarova, “Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik ‘Eryn gurban naadan’,” 19–20.

<sup>712</sup> Khangalov, “Novyye materialy o shamanstve u buryat,” 338.

<sup>713</sup> Banzarov, *Chernaya vera ili Shamanstvo u mongolov*, 42.

<sup>714</sup> Such an arrow is displaced in the local history museum of the village of Ulekchin in Southern Buryatia—a village, from which come a host of outstanding, internationally successful, Buryat archers.

<sup>715</sup> Khangalov, “Zegete-aba,” 25; idem, “Neskol’ko dannyykh dlya kharakteristiki byta severnykh buryat,” 185; “Novyye materialy o shamanstve u buryat,” 318.

<sup>716</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>717</sup> Khangalov and Agapitov, “Materialy dlya izucheniya shamanstva v Sibiri,” 289, 293; Khangalov, “Novyye materialy o shamanstve u buryat,” 432; Lodon Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat* (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel’stvo, 1972), 86; Yekaterina Khyrtygeyeva, “Sostyazaniya metkikh, sil’nykh i bystrykh,” *Nomer odin*, July 21, 2010: p. 23; Dandar D. Damsaranov, personal communication, Aga-Khangil (Aga Buryat region), June 1996.

<sup>718</sup> Cf. Dugarova, “Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik ‘Eryn gurban naadan’,” 19.

Evenks—many of whom, as outlined above, assimilated into Buryat tribes and whose culture in general influenced that of the Buryats considerably—shoot at wooden elk figures in their archery competitions, which they call “shooting at *syur*,” which means shooting at an elk’s *antler*. Antlers are an ancient sun symbol, which, for instance, was frequently depicted on the Bronze Age ‘deer stones mentioned above’<sup>719</sup> However, other symbolic meanings for the *sur*-targets have been suggested, and there were also other targets with yet other symbolic meanings at which Buryats shot in their archery competitions. Let us therefore take a short look at these various targets, which were, and in one case still are, used in Buryat archery competitions, and at their possible origins and symbolic meanings.

The *sury* (plural of *sur*),<sup>720</sup> the objects that uniformly serve as targets in any Buryat traditional archery competition today, are usually colored leather or cloth or (ideally) camel skin cushions of a cylindrical shape, about three to six inches long and “a hand’s breadth” in diameter. They are usually stuffed with sawdust, wool, felt, rags, or grass,<sup>721</sup> although the best *sury* are filled with hair from horses or wild goats (ibex) because of the water-repellent property of such hair. This is important, because these *sury* are laid on the ground in a row and need not only to be hit by the blunt *bolsu*-arrows described above, but also driven over a line drawn on the ground about six feet behind them, which becomes more difficult the heavier they are. This is why a material that does not soak up water when it rains is preferred.<sup>722</sup>

---

<sup>719</sup> See Tat’yana D. Skrynnikova, “Surkharban—interpretatsiya znacheniya ponyatiya,” in *Tsybikovskiyechteniya – 6: Problemy istoriya i kul’tury mongol’skikh narodov: Tezisy dokladov i soobshcheniy* (Ulan-Ude: 1993), 39–41; Babuyeva, *Material’naya i dukhovnaya kul’tura buryat*, 197–98; Nadezhda B. Dashiyeva, “Kalendar’ i kalendarnaya obryadnost’ buryat,” chapter 6 in *Buryaty*, ed. by Lyubov’ L. Abayeva and Natal’ya L. Zhukosvskaya (Moskva: Nauka, 2004), 213; and German Namzhilov, “Igry muzhey,” *Panorama Buryatii*, no. 1(1), July 2004: p. 21.

<sup>720</sup> In fact the “y”-ending is the plural-suffix in Russian. Such mixing of the two languages, or rather heavy, altering influence of Russian on the Buryat language, even down to basic grammatical features, is characteristic for the Buryat language. It started in the eighteenth century and increased in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

<sup>721</sup> Shagdaron and Ochirov, “Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat,” 475; Shornikov, “Metkaya strela,” 35; V. Karavayev, “Strely nad stadionom,” in *Natsional’nyye igry* (Moskva: Sovremennaya Rossiya, 1963), 15; Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 88; Nikolay Yan’kov, “Prazdnik luka,” *Nedelya*, no. 19 (1973): p. 23; V. Gorbunov, “Zveni tetiva!” in *Natsional’nyye vidy sporta*, ed. A. N. Piskarev (Moskva: Sovremennaya Rossiya, 1976), 45; Govorkov, “True to Age-Old Traditions,” 87; Iosif Ye. Tugutov, *Igry v obshchestvennoy zhizni buryat* (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel’stvo, 1989), 32.

<sup>722</sup> Tsyren-Dorzhi N. Magakov, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, July 2011.



According to Buryat socio-cultural anthropologist Radzhana Dugarova, whose dissertation (2004) is the seminal work on the semantics of Buryat archery,<sup>723</sup> these sury symbolize the small rodents the Buryats used to hunt en masse, which is the *tabargan*-marmots of the steppe, and the small fur animals of the forests, i.e. sables, ermines, squirrels etc. This is corroborated by a number of facts: first, the sury's appearance, which is indeed reminiscent of those animals; second, that in the competitions the same blunt *bolsu*-arrows are used as were in the real rodent-hunts; and third, that these *sur-kharban*-archery competitions originally had a cultic purpose, as they were carried out for honoring *bara*, the protector spirit of both the taiga and the hunters, a deity which can be traced back to the same-named and the same protecting tiger-goddess of the Scythians (i.e. also to an ancient Indo-Aryan culture).<sup>724</sup>

However, the time this particular type of the sury appeared among the Buryats is unknown. It might have happened only in the second half of the nineteenth century, because, although the use of such sury is described in all available ethnographic reports of archery competitions in the trans-Baikal region of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is also mentioned in all of them that in earlier times one shot at different targets; and, as regards the cis-Baikal Buryats, ethnographic reports show that they kept using different targets even up to the second quarter of the twentieth century.

One type of these targets was made of balls of dough cooked in milk, and stuck on sticks or slender laths that were stuck into the ground.<sup>725</sup> More often, however, these sticks or slender laths were wrapped with leather straps. Frequently leather straps were just intertwined, forming bundles or balls, which were laid on the ground. The leather straps were often taken from the horses' bridles, which the archers, after they had arrived at the place of the competition, took off their horses, knotted the sury with them, shot at them—with their *blunt* arrows—and, when they were done, unraveled them and put them as the bridles they were back on their horses.<sup>726</sup> It is

---

<sup>723</sup> Radzhana D. Dugarova, "Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik 'Eryn gurban naadan' ('Tri igrishcha muzhey') i ego mesto v kul'ture buryat," dissertatsiya na soiskaniye uchenoy stepeni kandidata istoricheskikh nauk, Buryatskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet (Ulan-Ude: 2004). See especially chapter 2 (*Glava 2*), 92–165.

<sup>724</sup> Dugarova, "Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik 'Eryn gurban naadan'," 20, 26. See also Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 17.

<sup>725</sup> Fomin and Shokhirev, *Istoriya fizicheskoy kul'tury i sporta Buryatii do 1917 goda*, 20.

<sup>726</sup> Klements and Khangalov, "Obshchestvennyye okhoty u severnykh buryat," 83–84; Khangalov, "Natsional'nyy prazdnik u buryat," 32; Zalkind, *Ocherki istorii kul'tury Buryatii*, 160; Nikolay Yan'kov, "Prazdnik luka," *Nedelya*, no. 19 (1973): p. 23; Gerasimova, Galdanova and Ochirova, *Traditsionnaya kul'tura buryat*, 104;

these leather straps, from which *sur-kharban* has its actual literal meaning, which is “shooting at a leather strap,” because *sur* (*suur*, *hur*, *huur*)<sup>727</sup> in Buryat means “leather strap” and *kharban* “shooting.”

Another type of *sury* was small bundles of straw, which were used in some places in Cis-Baikalia.<sup>728</sup> In Trans-Baikalia, in turn, in some places the cylindrical leather or cloth cushions were not called *sury*, but *bülen*.<sup>729</sup> In yet other places the latter term was used for yet another, much bigger, target. Among the Buryats of the region of Khorinsk in east-central Buryatia, a *bülen* was a large piece of larch bark—approximately the height of a person—with another round piece of bark affixed at its top, so that from a distance the whole figure looked like that of a human. In all likelihood, the Buryats there adopted this target from the Evenks, because for the word *bülen* no Buryat or Mongolian etymology can be found, whereas in Evenk it means “enemy,” which fits perfectly with the target’s human shape.<sup>730</sup> A variant of this target was the *bülen-tokhom*, the “saddle-cloth-bülen”, consisting of an about five by five feet large saddle-cloth stretched between two poles.<sup>731</sup>

Another target constituted a very specific ‘enemy image.’ This was the *bay*, an about six to seven feet high, five feet wide, and eight to ten inches thick wall made of grass sods, on top of which three triangular pieces of sod or pieces of thick felt were affixed, two of them at the outer ends and one in the middle.<sup>732</sup> The result was a structure reminiscent of an *ostrog*, that is, of the

---

Bayaskhala B. Dabain, Valeriy M. Sydeyev, L. D. Tsybikova and A. M. Tsaganov, *Moya Dzhida, dolina bogatyrskaya* (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2005), 27.

<sup>727</sup> In Buryat the consonants “s” and “h” are in many cases interchangeable. It depends on the dialect whether the one or the other is used. For example, “good” is either *sayn* or *hayn* and “milk” can be either *süü* or *hüü*, and the archery competition either *sur-kharban* or *hur-kharban*. Similarly with the length of vowels: it rarely makes for any different meaning; thus, *sur* and *suur*, *hur* and *huur*, have all the same meaning; and the same with *kharban* and *kharbaan*. Thus *sur-kharban* means the same as, e.g., *huur-kharbaan*. To know this is helpful for not getting confused when researching the literature about Buryat archery, because all these possible forms appear in it.

<sup>728</sup> Pëtr F. Trebukhovskiy, *Sur-kharban balaganskikh buryat v proshlom i nastoyashchem* (Irkutsk: Vlast’ Truda, 1927), 4; Tugutov, *Material’naya kul’tura buryat*, 42.

<sup>729</sup> Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevol’yutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 87; Gerasimova, Galdanova and Ochirova, *Traditsionnaya kul’tura buryat*, 104; Rigzhidma Ganchikzhapova, personal communication, Sugalay (Aga Buryat Region), June 1996.

<sup>730</sup> Dugarova, “Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik ‘Eryn gurban naadan’,” 20.

<sup>731</sup> Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 36–37; Radzhana D. Dugarova, “Raznovidnosti traditsionnoy sportivnoy strel’by iz luka u buryat,” in *Aktual’nyye problem buryatskogo yazyka, literatury, istorii*, ed. Ye. K. Sharakhshinova (Irkutsk: 2000), 67–68.

<sup>732</sup> U.-Zh. Sh. Dondukov and B.-N. Tsyrenov, “Bay”, in *Etnograficheskiy sbornik*, issue 1, ed. Kseniya M. Gerasimova and Iosif Ye. Tugutov (Ulan-Ude: 1960), 131.

type of forts the invading Russian Cossacks built in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (which, as described above, were often attacked by Buryats). How this target got its name reflects, in an interesting way, this early (violent) phase of Buryat-Russian contact, and the Russian conquest of Siberia in general. The word *bay* does not originate in Buryat or Mongolian and neither in Russian, but in Yakutian, in which *bay khara* is a synonym for *bar khara*, the Yakuts' tiger-goddess and protector spirit of the taiga. However, as the Russian conquerors also liked the image of the tiger, they made it the main symbol in the coats-of-arms of many of their ostrogs and towns in Siberia, including several in the Yakutian region, from which many Cossack squads began their conquest of the Buryat region. This is why the Buryats who first encountered and fought them had the impression that this *bay*-tiger—which is how they perceived it—was these evil men's protector spirit, which they therefore needed to fight.<sup>733</sup> And they kept doing so—magically and symbolically—in their *bay-kharban*-competitions for three centuries, as these competitions were carried out in some Buryat regions until the 1930s.<sup>734</sup>

The last in this list of different targets, which were used in Buryat archery competitions, is the *tümkhe*,<sup>735</sup> which was a round, drum-shaped leather bag of about three feet in diameter stuffed with wool and with five holes on its drumhead-like side, into which the competitors tried to shoot their arrows. This target symbolized an enemy's face and soul.<sup>736</sup>

Taken all together, most of the targets historically used in Buryat archery competitions bear symbolic meanings, which unambiguously show that these competitions have been closely linked with and even originate in warfare, which is not surprising, given the crucial role archery had played in Buryat warfighting for most of their history. However, the targets which in the end, as it seems, won out over all others, are those which are linked with hunting. It is the small leather or cloth cushions, the *sury*, symbolizing the hunted rodents, which in traditional Buryat archery competitions have now already been invariably used for about three quarters of a century, and there are no signs that this might change in the foreseeable future.

---

<sup>733</sup> Radzhana D. Dugarova, "Semantika traditsionnogo buryatskogo sostyazaniya v strel'be iz luka 'bay kharbaan'," in *Mir Tsentral'noy Azii*, vol. 3, *Kul'turologiya. Filosofiya. Istochnikovedeniye*, ed. B. V. Bazarov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs SO RAN, 2002), 35–36; Dugarova, "Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik 'Eryn gurban naadan'," 21–22.

<sup>734</sup> Dondukov and Tsyrenov, "Bay", 132.

<sup>735</sup> In the literature often referred to as "tunka", which is the Russified version of the term.

<sup>736</sup> Zalkind, *Ocherki istorii kul'tury Buryatii*, 163; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 37–38; Dugarova, "Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik 'Eryn gurban naadan'," 20–21.

What, however, Buryat ‘war-like’ and ‘hunt-like’ archery competitions had in common was their principal *cultic*, or *magic*, character. Before every *bay-kharban* the elders prayed to the protector spirits of their clan and asked them to help their team in the upcoming competition. Then, during the competition all competitors smeared a little bit of butter on the bay, that is, sacrificed *sagaan edeen*—holy “white food”—to its spirit, after which, however, they shot at it again.<sup>737</sup> When, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the course of the above mentioned empire-wide land reform most Buryats were deprived from most of their pasture lands,<sup>738</sup> in *Shargalzhin*, a Buryat ulus in southern Trans-Baikalia, specifically as a means of counter-magic against the feared land-grab a grandiose bay-kharban competition was organized and, according to local people there, it worked: the ulus could indeed keep its inherited land—an exceptional, possibly unique, case which people there still believe happened precisely because of that (magic) bay-kharban competition.<sup>739</sup>

As regards the *sur-kharban* competitions, up to the present day, archers, judges, and spectators most often adhere to the custom of singing the *bara*, a ritual song of praise performed every time after an archer has hit a sur (and driven it behind the line). This song applauds the marksman (or markswoman) but more importantly it aims to please and gratify the tiger-goddess of the same name—the protector-spirit of the hunters, warriors, and archers—who is believed to be invisibly present.<sup>740</sup> With a simple verse, but repeated often, when the archers do well, the Buryats make sure that she gets to know this too: “*Bara-ee, bara daa, zey khiykharey mergen!* (Bara, cheers! Bara, hooray! What an accurate marksman!)”<sup>741</sup> In former times, it was, however, also believed that the most outstanding of these marksmen could themselves become almost on a par with their goddess, as they, so went the belief, could become *khaty*—divine dwellers of the

---

<sup>737</sup> Dondukov and Tsyrenov, “Bay”, 130–31.

<sup>738</sup> See above, p. 134.

<sup>739</sup> Dugarova, “Semantika traditsionnogo buryatskogo sostyazaniya v strel’be iz luka ‘bay kharbaan’,” 36–37.

<sup>740</sup> Dugarova, “Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik ‘Eryn gurban naadan’,” 23.

<sup>741</sup> Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 88, English translation mine. There have been variations of this praise song, some of which are still sung, but these variations are very similar and of the same simple content. See e.g. Vesvolod N. Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross, V. S. Kovaleva and Ye. I. Stepanova, *Igry narodov SSSR* (Moskva: Akademiya, 1933), 350; and Nikolay Yan’kov, “Prazdnik luka,” *Nedelya*, no. 19 (1973): p. 23.

sky.<sup>742</sup> At any rate were their names remembered for ages and some of them even praised in folksongs.<sup>743</sup>

Also today practically everybody in Buryatia knows the Buryat archers who have successfully performed at Olympic Games or at world or European championships. In what follows I will describe the developments and changes in the Buryat archery competitions of about the last one and a half centuries, which on the one hand have led to continuously successful performances of Buryat archers in these highest echelons of modern international sportive archery, but which also kept many age-old traditions alive.

## **Buryat sportive archery**

### ***Buryat archery competitions in the pre-Soviet period***

Ethnographic reports of Buryat archery competitions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century not only show that many different targets, as outlined above, were used, but also that the rules, according to which the competitions were carried out, varied greatly. This regards the distances from which the targets were shot at, the numbers of targets, the ways they were positioned, the numbers of shot arrows, the numbers of participating archers, the scoring systems or ways of determining the winner(s), and other details and peculiarities. There were also, however, a number of common features. One of them was that both the unit of measure and measuring device for distance was the ‘bow,’ or, more precisely, the string of a strung bow, the length of which was approximately five feet.

As regards the distances, from which was shot at the targets, they, logically, were the greater, the greater the used targets were. At a head-high bay was, for instance, shot from distances up to 70 bows, that is, 350 feet, whereas at the small sury the distance was in some cases reduced to just 10 bows, i.e. 50 feet. The distances, however, varied frequently also within or during a single competition. When the targets were the sury, most often the competitors shot first from a far

---

<sup>742</sup> Aleksandr V. Gadlo, *Etnografiya narodov Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka* (Leningrad: 1987), 38.

<sup>743</sup> Khangalov, “Zegete-aba—oblava na zverey u drevnikh buryat,” 17; Boris D. Sandabov, “Legko li stat' mergenom?” *Pravda Buryatii* September 10, 1969.

distance—40, 50 or even 60 bows—but in a second round from usually a ten bows shorter distance; and there are cases reported, in which were shot more than two rounds, even up to six, in which case the distances decreased from first 60 to 50 to 40 to 30 to 20, and eventually to 10 bows.<sup>744</sup>

As regards the rules according to which the competitions were carried out, they reveal interesting facts, not only about archery, but also about social life and organization among the Buryats. Archery *per se* is a solitary activity, because one draws the bow and releases the arrow all by oneself and, in fact, *can* only do this by oneself. Hence, as a sport, it belongs to the category of *individual sports*. Notwithstanding this, many of the Buryat archery competitions described in the ethnographic reports of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were competitions between two *teams*. More precisely, it seems that the majority of competitions in *Trans-Baikalia* had been such team events, whereas for *Cis-Baikalia*, only individual competitions have been reported. This possibly reflects the differences between the trans-Baikal and cis-Baikal Buryats regarding their levels and degrees of social cohesion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which, in turn, were an outcome of the significant differences in how they managed and distributed their main means of production. In both cases this meant land, but the trans-Baikal Buryats had plenty of it even after Russian farmers had taken large tracts of land away from them. By contrast, the cis-Baikal Buryats, due to the natural borders all around their area, had less land even before the Russians arrived, and then lost to them considerably more than the trans-Baikal Buryats. The result was that they were split into small, scattered, sedentarized groups with very little land for their use, which they needed for individual, private use to ensure a harvest of enough hay to feed their small herds through the winter, and increasingly they reduced livestock breeding in favor of Russian-style arable farming. All this led to increased conflicts between the groups over the limited land resources, which in turn caused them to constantly shift alliances, even leading to dissolutions and (re)inventions of kin groups by way of manipulating the genealogies.<sup>745</sup> Thus the cis-Baikal Buryats' feelings of

---

<sup>744</sup> Shagdarov and Ochirov, "Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat," 476; Boris D. Sandanov, "Buryatskiye natsional'nyye vidy sporta," *Teoriya i praktika fizicheskoy kul'tury* 2 (1964): 57; idem, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 37; Bimba Dorzhiyevich Tsibikov, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

<sup>745</sup> Caroline Humphrey, "The Uses of Genealogy: A Historical Study of the Nomadic and Sedentarised Buryat," in *Pastoral Production and Society: Proceedings of the International Meeting on Nomadic Pastoralism / Production pastorale et société: actes du colloque international sur le pastoralisme nomade, Paris 1–3 Déc. 1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 238–251.

belonging to a certain clan or lineage became weaker and weaker in the course of this process. In addition to these economic reasons generated by the Russian invasion, that is by an *external* cause, there were also *internal* factors of the cis-Baikal Buryats' society that contributed to this process, which "derived from ideological principles and [...] ritual practices"<sup>746</sup> prevalent among them. These were of such that any kind of power a person could gain was restricted to certain social or ritualistic spheres, limited in its duration, and also constantly challenged by others. Therefore neither any elders nor any shamans nor anyone of the also much-esteemed bards could ever exercise any long-lasting overarching power. In other words, the cis-Baikal Buryats' society had strong egalitarian traits.<sup>747</sup> The trans-Baikal Buryats, by contrast, could still maintain their traditional way of life, characterized by nomadic stock breeding and common use of land, due to the continued availability of sufficient pasture land (at least until the land-reform in the first years of the twentieth century). Thus, kin group identities and feelings of belonging together, that is, of group cohesiveness, persisted among them to a much higher degree than among the cis-Baikal Buryats. Unlike them, they were organized in large patrilines with powerful leaders at the top.<sup>748</sup> They therefore often formed clan teams which competed against each other in their archery competitions.<sup>749</sup>

In terms of archery itself, the differing rules of Buryat archery competitions reveal the three principal goals of this activity: to shoot far, to hit the target, and to hit it hard, in other words, far range, great accuracy, and hard punch. The last was necessary in big-game hunting (and, of course, also useful in warfare). In the competitions of the *cis*-Baikal Buryats, it was—in addition to accuracy—a hard punch which counted most, because they shot either at sury of the type which were stuck in the ground, out of which the archers had to knock them with their arrow shot and to push as far away from their original position as possible, or they shot at a straw bundle sur, which they also had to push off its position as far as possible. The archer who could

---

<sup>746</sup> Roberte N. Hamayon, "A Challenging Technique Involving Imaginary Figures of Power among the Pre-Soviet West-Buryats," chapter 1 in *States of Mind: Power, Place and the Subject in Inner Asia*, ed. David Sneath (Bellingham: Western Washington University Press, 2006), 16.

<sup>747</sup> *Ibid.*, 15–35.

<sup>748</sup> Humphrey, "The Uses of Genealogy," 238–47.

<sup>749</sup> Karp D. Loginovskiy, "Igry buryat Vostochnago Zabaykal'ya," *Zapiski chitinskago otdeleniya priamurskago otdela imperatorskago russkago geograficheskago obshchestva* 2 (1897): 46; Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevol'yutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 87; Dorzhiyeva, "Strel'ba iz luka kak sotsiokul'turnyy fenomen buryatskoy kul'tury," 146.

drive the sur the farthest won the competition.<sup>750</sup> In turn, in *Trans-Baikalia* a bit more stress was put on being able to hit a target from a far distance, as in all competitions there, no matter whether it was shooting at a bay, a bülen, a tünkhe, or sury, the archers had, at least in the first round, to shoot at them from rather far distances. However, when the targets were the small sury-cushions, the archers also had to not only hit them, but (as mentioned above) also drive them over the line drawn one-and-a-half bows behind the line where they were placed.<sup>751</sup>

Important to note is that another parallel line was also drawn on the other side, also at a distance of one-and-a-half bows from the line of the sury. Thus, there were three parallel lines with equal distances—one-and-a-half bows each—between them. Along the middle line the sury were placed. Along both outer lines, a one- to two-inch-deep furrow was grooved, called *zuraakhay* in Buryat. These were grooved in order to stop arrows that were not shot far enough, but landed on the ground before the *zuraakhay* and slid on the ground towards the sury. One wanted to stop these arrows, because such a shot, even when the arrow hit a sur, was disallowed. The arrow had to be shot at least as far as the *zuraakhay*, which both the furrows and the arrangement of the two furrows and the sury together—i.e. this whole target area—were called. If it landed behind the first furrow, slid from there on the ground, hit a sur, and drove it behind the other furrow, the shot counted.<sup>752</sup> An ideal shot, however, was considered to be when the arrow did not touch the ground at all before it hit the sur.

The *zuraakhay*-furrows were grooved on both sides of the sury, because the archers shot from both sides at them; not at the same time, of course, but consecutively. Usually the teams were themselves divided into two groups, the members of one shooting from one side, and the members of the other from the other side. It was custom that shooting was begun from the side

---

<sup>750</sup> Khangalov, “Natsional’nyy prazdnik u buryat,” 32; Kulakov and Molodykh, *Illyustrirovannoye opisaniye*, 181; Trebukhovskiy, *Sur-kharban balaganskikh buryat*, 4.

<sup>751</sup> Loginovskiy, “Igry buryat Vostochnago Zabaykal’ya,” 46; Shagdaron and Ochirov, “Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat,” 475–76; Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 88; Zalkind, *Ocherki istorii kul’tury Buryatii*, 161–62; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 33; Gerasimova, Galdanova and Ochirova, *Traditsionnaya kul’tura buryat*, 104–5; Baldandorzhiyn Puntsyk, personal communication, Kizhinga (Buryatia), June 1997.

<sup>752</sup> Loginovskiy, “Igry buryat Vostochnago Zabaykal’ya,” 46; Shagdaron and Ochirov, “Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat,” 475–76; Vsevolodskiy-Gemgross, Kovaleva and Stepanova, *Igry narodov SSSR*, 349; Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 87–88; Gerasimova, Galdanova and Ochirova, *Traditsionnaya kul’tura buryat*, 105; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 33; Dorzhiyeva, “Strel’ba iz luka kak sotsiokul’turnyy fenomen buryatskoy kul’tury,” 145–46.



“of the rising sun.” When the groups of both teams on that side had finished, the two groups on the other side started.<sup>753</sup>

The number of sury was most often not regulated by established rules, but agreed upon before every competition and varied between about one-and-a-half times to five times higher than the number of the archers participating in the competition. Thus, when the number of the latter was high—as, for instance, at the big competitions between the Buryats of the Selenga and Ivolga *aimaks* (districts) carried out annually in the nineteenth century, in which up to 300 archers participated—the line of sury could easily become more than a hundred feet long. The cylindrical sury were laid on the ground horizontally and touching each other, so that they looked like a long sausage.<sup>754</sup>

A special kind of sury were the so-called *lasti*, which were also of a cylindrical shape and of about the same length as the others, but of a much smaller diameter of just about an inch. They had a small tassel made of thin straps of red fabric, about one inch long and one inch thick, at one end. Unlike the regular sury, the lasti were positioned upright—with the tassel on top—but also touching the neighboring sury, that is, squeezed in between them. As they were much thinner than the regular sury, it was much harder to hit them. There were also far fewer lasti than regular sury; therefore, the lasti counted more than the sury.<sup>755</sup>

The scoring systems, however, also varied greatly. But most often the sury and lasti, which the members of each team could hit and push behind the rear zuraakhay, were collected at the side, and not put in place again. That way the number of the sury and lasti steadily decreased during the course of the competition, thus they became harder to hit, which is why, as mentioned

---

<sup>753</sup> Shagdaron and Ochirov, “Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat,” 475; Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross, Kovaleva and Stepanova, *Igry narodov SSSR*, 349; Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevol'yutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 88; Zalkind, *Ocherki istorii kul'tury Buryatii*, 162; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 33; Dorzhiyeva, “Strel'ba iz luka kak sotsiokul'turnyy fenomen buryatskoy kul'tury,” 146.

<sup>754</sup> Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 37; Dorzhiyeva, “Strel'ba iz luka kak sotsiokul'turnyy fenomen buryatskoy kul'tury,” 146.

<sup>755</sup> Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevol'yutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 89. According to the Buryat ethnographer and expert in ancient Buryat symbolism, Nadezhda B. Dashieyeva, the lasti's tassel symbolizes the sun and the whole target the world mountain with the sun on top. Nadezhda B. Dashieyeva, “Kalendar' i kalendar'naya obryadnost',” chapter 6 in *Buryaty*, ed. Lyubov' L. Abayeva and Natal'ya L. Zhukosvskaya (Moskva: Nauka, 2004), 213.

above, often the distances from which the archers shot were reduced during a competition.<sup>756</sup> Finally, after all sury and lasti were hit, one counted how many each team had, whereby usually a sur counted one point and a lasti two points. The team which achieved more points won the round. A competition, however, consisted of many rounds, which is why it often lasted for two, three, or even more days, and sometimes was even continued at nighttime in the light of bonfires. The teams either agreed on how many rounds they would shoot before they started the competition, or the competition only ended when the team which was down accepted its defeat. Often, when the competition was not one between uluses or aimaks, one tried to form equally strong teams to make the competition both thrilling and interesting, and its result as unpredictable as possible.<sup>757</sup>

During the whole competition the archers shot in pairs consisting of one member from each team. Usually each of them shot eight arrows, but only two in a row, after which the archer from the other team shot his first two arrows, after which the first archer shot his next two arrows and so forth—that is, they shot in turns four times each, shooting two arrows each time. Then the next pair of archers did the same, then the next one, and so forth until the game was over.<sup>758</sup> In this way the fight between the teams swayed constantly to and fro throughout the whole competition, and every such pair of archers fought their own battles, which, in turn, made for all kinds of tactical choices of the teams.

Because of all this, and regardless of whether it was inter-aimak, inter-ulus, or just local ulus competitions, each event attracted hundreds and often thousands of spectators, thus functioning

---

<sup>756</sup> Loginovskiy, “Igry buryat Vostochnago Zabaykal’ya,” 46; Shagdaron and Ochirov, “Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat,” 476; Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 89; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 33; Dorzhiyeva, “Strel’ba iz luka kak sotsiokul’turnyy fenomen buryatskoy kul’tury,” 146.

<sup>757</sup> Shagdaron and Ochirov, “Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat,” 475–77; Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross, Kovaleva and Stepanova, *Igry narodov SSSR*, 350; Karavayev, “Strely nad stadionom,” 16–17; Zalkind, *Ocherki istorii kul’tury Buryatii*, 161–163; Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 89; Gorbunov, “Zveni tetiva!” 46; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 33; Dorzhiyeva, “Strel’ba iz luka kak sotsiokul’turnyy fenomen buryatskoy kul’tury,” 146–47; Dandar D. Damsaranov, personal communication, Aga-Khangil (Aga Buryat Region), June 1996.

<sup>758</sup> Shagdaron and Ochirov, “Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat,” 476; Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross, Kovaleva and Stepanova, *Igry narodov SSSR*, 349; Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 88; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 33; Gerasimova, Galdanova and Ochirova, *Traditsionnaya kul’tura buryat*, 104–5; Dorzhiyeva, “Strel’ba iz luka kak sotsiokul’turnyy fenomen buryatskoy kul’tury,” 146.

as big social events, true spectacles in the steppe.<sup>759</sup> Thus the winners of the competitions obtained great fame and glory and were long and loudly praised by their kin, clan, and ulus people. However, what they did *not* win in most cases was money or any other material prize. Although often a few kopecks<sup>760</sup> were staked by the teams, this had a mere symbolical characteristic comparable to that of play money.<sup>761</sup> To compete in archery for real money was widely considered dishonorable and indeed seems to have almost never happened.<sup>762</sup> The love of archery and the honor earned from victory were sufficient. Therefore archery as a *sportive* activity upheld its great popularity among the Buryats throughout time.

However, beginning in the last decades of the nineteenth century and increasingly in the first two of the twentieth century, archery competitions lost some popularity.<sup>763</sup> This occurred first because, by that time, firearms had superseded bows and arrows even in the Buryats' daily lives.<sup>764</sup> Second, this loss of popularity of archery was also a ramification of the general decline of traditional Buryat customs due to the unfriendly, socio-political environment of the late-Tsarist years described above. Finally, modern, Western conceptions of *sports* had not yet arrived in eastern Siberia or elsewhere in Russia by that time. This, however, changed very fast in the following era.

### *Archery among the Buryats in the Soviet period*

Practically from the beginning of the new Soviet rule in both the cis- and trans-Baikal regions of Siberia all kinds of sports were fostered, as the local Soviet leaders there had no ideological

---

<sup>759</sup> Loginovskiy, "Igry buryat Vostochnago Zabaykal'ya," 46; Kulakov and Molodykh, *Illyustrirovannoye opisaniye*, 178, 180; Sandanov, "Surkharban—massovyy sportivnyy prazdnik buryatskogo naroda," 92; idem, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 37.

<sup>760</sup> Kopecks are the smallest unit of Russian currency; 1 ruble = 100 kopecks.

<sup>761</sup> Shagdaron and Ochirov, "Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat," 478; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 32; Lodon Linkhovoin, *Lodon bagshin debterhee* (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo "Buryaad-mongol nom", 2012), 271.

<sup>762</sup> Dandar D. Damsaranov, personal communication, Aga-Khangil (Aga Buryat Region), June 1996. The only exception seems to have been the bay-kharban, as this is the only competition reported where winners received cash prizes.

<sup>763</sup> Yumsunov, "Istoriya proiskhozhdeniya odinnadtsati khorinskikh rodov," 85; Kulakov and Molodykh, *Illyustrirovannoye opisaniye*, 180; Sandanov, "Buryatskiye natsional'nyye vidy sporta," 57; Zalkind, *Ocherki istorii kul'tury Buryatii*, 162.

<sup>764</sup> Vadim Yu. Myasnikov, "Voyennoye delo buryat v XVII–XVIII vv," in *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 4, ed. V. M. Alekseyeva et al. (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2003), 114. Cf. also Kabzińska-Stawarz, "Eriin Gurvan Naadam," 46–47.

reservations regarding sports' competitive character. Such sensitivities—even short-lived among the revolutionaries in Saint Petersburg and Moscow<sup>765</sup>—did not make it to Siberia. In 1922—that is, not much more than a year after the Civil War ended in that region—the party secretary of the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Province of the RSFSR, Mr. Trubacheyev, urged the local members of the Komsomol—the party's youth organization—to propagate both Western sports and Russian folk games and also “to revitalize the forgotten Buryat sports like archery” and to “absolutely preserve” in all of them “the principle of competition.”<sup>766</sup> This was confirmed at several other party, government, and Komsomol meetings and in published “theses” in the same and the following years.<sup>767</sup>

Thus, like Buryat wrestling, Buryat archery was fostered by the Soviet authorities. In 1924, they resumed the above mentioned traditional championships between the archers of the Selenga and Ivolga Aimaks, and organized them until approximately the mid-1930s. They made them well attended, one week long mega-events, in which, as in former times, hundreds of archers participated.<sup>768</sup>

Also from 1924 onwards, the Soviet authorities of all the Buryat regions strived to include archery competitions in the programs of the Surkharban festivals, which they tried to organize annually in all communities, district centers, and the republic's capital Verkhneudinsk, to be renamed into Ulan-Ude in 1934. They also took steps to implement unified rules for the archery competitions.<sup>769</sup> Both these attempts were, however, only partially successful. In many regions archery could not be revitalized and thus not included into the festivals' programs. Instead, often competitions in rifle shooting were organized.<sup>770</sup> The attempts to unify the rules for Buryat archery also largely failed in these early years of Soviet rule. Only the variants of shooting at the cushion-sury could be, as it seems, more or less unified, but those Buryats in southern Trans-Baikalia who traditionally shot at a bay continued, as mentioned above, to do so until the mid-1930s, and cis-Baikal Buryats continued to practice their specific variant of shooting at only one

---

<sup>765</sup> See above, pp. 55–56.

<sup>766</sup> Cited in Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 44, translation mine.

<sup>767</sup> Ibid., 45; idem, “Yunost' drevnikh igr,” *Molodëzh' Buryatii*, December 20, 1963: p. 4.

<sup>768</sup> Sandanov, *Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport v Buryatii*, 27; idem, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 50–51.

<sup>769</sup> Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 45.

<sup>770</sup> E.g. at the Surkharbans of the Buryats settling in the area of the mouth of the river Goloustnaya at the western shore of Lake Baikal. Dora A. Bortosova, personal communication, Bol'shoie Goloustnoye (Irkutsk Province), June 2004.

straw-bundle-sur (determining the winner by measuring how far every archer could push it) at least until 1927.<sup>771</sup>

Only about two and a half decades later, in 1952, unified rules were eventually enforced. These rules stipulated that the targets had to be nineteen cushion-sury, nine pairs of which to be consecutively numbered from one to nine and the remaining, the nineteenth cushion-sur, to be labeled with the number ten. They had to be placed on a line, with the sur bearing the number ten standing upright in the center, and the others laid horizontally to the left and right from that central sur, touching each other, and with their numbers decreasing from nine to one. Thus, seen from left to right, the sury's numbers—which denoted how much they counted when hit—appeared as follows: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. An approved variation was that only nine sury were put up in the same way, but counting 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 8, 6, 4, 2 points, respectively, when hit. One and a half bows—or two meters (six and a half feet)—before and behind this sausage-like looking row of sury, lines had to be drawn, over the front one of which the arrow had to fly, and behind the rear one the sury had to be pushed. The archers had to shoot in pairs, and from two different distances—40 meters (131 feet) and 50 meters (164 feet). From each distance they had to shoot eight arrows, four times two, and alternate between each other after every series of two shots.<sup>772</sup>

Clearly, these rules constitute a combination of traditional Buryat practices—with respect to the type and the set-up of the targets—with elements characteristic of modern (achievement) sports—as regards the points system.<sup>773</sup> From a 'sportive' perspective this measure was absolutely successful, as it turned Buryat archery into a very good practice and/or preparation for international archery, the fostering of which became a goal of Soviet sport authorities in general and of those in Buryatia in particular from the late 1950s onwards.<sup>774</sup> It is important to note that these new rules were also well received and thus readily adopted by the archers themselves,

---

<sup>771</sup> This is the year in which Pëtr F. Trebukhovskiy's detailed description of the Surkharban in the cis-Baikal Buryat village of Odissa was published, and is the same year from which his latest data stems (see Trebukhovskiy, *Sur-kharban balaganskikh buryat*, 3), but most likely this was not the last year this competition was carried out.

<sup>772</sup> Karavayev, "Strely nad stadionom," 17; Sandanov, "Buryatskiye natsional'nyye vidy sporta," 57.

<sup>773</sup> Dorzhiyeva, "Strel'ba iz luka kak sotsiokul'turnyy fenomen buryatskoy kul'tury," 147.

<sup>774</sup> Sandanov, "Buryatskiye natsional'nyye vidy sporta," 58; idem, *Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport v Buryatii*, 147; Fomin, "Narodnyye vidy sporta buryat," 386.

which, of course, greatly facilitated their enactment.<sup>775</sup> This bears mentioning particularly in regard to later, and even recent, post-Soviet rule changes, which were/are often not welcomed by many of the athletes themselves and thus did/do cause widespread dissatisfaction among them.<sup>776</sup> I will come back to this later on.

Back in the 1950s and in the following decade, archery developed well in both the Buryat Republic and in the two Buryat Autonomous Regions. In the Aga Buryat Autonomous Region especially it not only kept its traditionally high popularity but increased it. There was an archery *seksiya*—i.e. a club—in almost every kolkhoz school, in which all-in-all over 500 students practiced this sport on a regular basis by the 1960s. Also, in several districts of the Republic of Buryatia and in the Ust'-Orda Buryat Autonomous Region, similar booms of this sport could be observed.<sup>777</sup> However, in regions where archery had practically died out before the onset of this new boom, it could rarely be revived. In these areas, newfound popularity for archery happened only in cases where single exceptional archers appeared who took the effort to educate a new generation of archers in their village or district. One example for this is Dashi-Nima Radnayeovich Erdyniyev, who became the first “master of sport” of Buryatia and who made his home, the Barguzin valley, a true cradle of archers in the 1960s and following decades.<sup>778</sup> Another example is Shagdar Aleksandrovich Khazagayev, who, more recently—from the 1980s onwards—could achieve the same in his home village of Ulekchin in the Zakamensk District.

The reference itself, that Erdyniyev became the first “master of sport” of Buryatia, is as important as its explanation. In the Soviet Union, a unique official system of “sportive classification” (*sportivnaya klassifikatsiya*) for outstanding athletes was started in 1935 and was adopted for Buryat archery (as well as for Buryat wrestling) by the republic’s sport authorities in 1956, which has been administered ever since.<sup>779</sup> This bureaucratic system determines for every sport which particular results, and how many of them, an athlete has to achieve in the competitions in which he or she participates, in order to be awarded with particular titles. It is a hierarchical rank-order system, starting with the title of a “master of sport candidate,” and going

---

<sup>775</sup> See e.g. Dashi-Nima R. Erdyniyev, “Nuzhny li takiye pravila?” in *Pervyy mergen Buryatii*, ed. S. D. Ochirov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'skiy dom “Buryaad unen”, 2005), 44–45.

<sup>776</sup> *Ibid.*, 45–46.

<sup>777</sup> See e.g. Shornikov, “Metkaya strela,” 34; N. Bal'zhinimayev, “Sur-Kharban,” *Aginskaya Pravda*, August 8, 1968; and Gorbunov, “Zveni tetiva!” 45.

<sup>778</sup> Cf. Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 84.

<sup>779</sup> Sandanov, *Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport v Buryatii*, 140.

on with the title (in the Buryat case) of a “master of sport of the Republic of Buryatia,” which is outranked by the “master of sport of the Russian Federation” (“of the USSR,” in Soviet times), and topped by the “master of sport of international class.” Both in Soviet times and today, for athletes all over Russia, these titles carry much weight. Therefore, their implementation, for both Buryat traditional archery and international archery, contributed significantly to the popularity of both these types of archery among the Buryats in the last six decades.<sup>780</sup>

In rural areas—in which the majority of the Buryats lived for most of the Soviet period—another motivation played an important role in many (young) Buryats’ striving to become successful archers. This was “to see the world,” as outstanding Buryat archer Vladimir Nikolayevich Yesheyev, the 1987 world champion and 1988 Olympic bronze medalist, told me his main motivation for sedulously practicing archery in his remote home village of Novaya Zarya, located in the far east of Trans-Baikalia, even beyond the Aga Buryat Region.<sup>781</sup> Having been for years a member of the national archery team of the USSR and being today the president of the Russian Archery Federation and a member of the Russian Olympic Committee indeed let him “see the world.”

While Yesheyev’s story is surely exceptional, many similar stories can be told about Buryat archers of the last five decades, as many of them have competed very successfully both nationally and internationally. One reason for this is of course the age-old tradition that archery has held among the Buryats. But the Soviet policy of fostering both traditional and international archery significantly contributed to this too. Almost immediately after the first appearance of international archery in Russia—at the Third International Youth and Student Friendship Games in Moscow in 1957, where Buryat archers saw for the first time modern, Western plastic bows—many schools in Buryatia, and in particular those in the Aga Buryat Autonomous Region, purchased such bows for their archery *seksiya*, and their students started to practice with them.<sup>782</sup> Then it took just a few years until Buryat archers also succeeded in this (for them) new variant of archery: in 1966, the aforementioned Dashi-Nima Erdyniyev becomes “master of sport” precisely in this type of archery; in 1970, Mels Dabayev from the Aga Buryat Autonomous Region becomes champion of the RSFSR; in 1972, the aforementioned Vladimir Yesheyev—then just seventeen years old—wins the bronze medal at the Fifth Spartakiade of the

---

<sup>780</sup> Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 66.

<sup>781</sup> Vladimir N. Yesheyev, personal communication, Moscow, August 2004.

<sup>782</sup> Sandanov, “Buryatskiye natsional’nyye vidy sporta,” 58.

Peoples of the USSR; and in the same year, Galina Arkhinova, a doctor in the regional hospital of the Aga Buryat Autonomous Region, wins the women's championship of the USSR.<sup>783</sup>

Arkhinova's success points to an important development in Buryat archery, which also happened in the course of the 1960s. Girls' and women's archery became common and widespread in those years. Buryat women, as mentioned above, historically have been as good if not better archers than the men and participated in all activities which required good archery skills, i.e. in hunting and warfare. But when archery became increasingly a mere leisure time activity in the course of the nineteenth century, the archery competitions apparently became male-only pastimes, as all sources for this time uniformly describe them as such.<sup>784</sup> And this did not change until the late 1960s, when the Republic's sport authorities finally called for organizing archery competitions for women.<sup>785</sup> Then, however, it did change quite rapidly. Given the opportunity again, Buryat girls and women very quickly drew level with the men, as was impressively proven by Arkhinova's success. In her footsteps followed Khanda-Tsyren Gombozhapova, who, in addition to other great successes, qualified for the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, in which she, however, eventually could not participate, because of the USSR and other socialist countries', last-minute announced boycott of the games. At the *Druzhba* (Friendship) Games in Prague, alternatively organized by these countries in the same year, she won the gold medal.<sup>786</sup>

As already stated, the boom of the international style of archery among the Buryat archers did not mean that traditional *Buryat* archery was abandoned. At the annual Surkharban festivals, normally only competitions in the Buryat style of archery were organized, and for many years they remained their '*nationalnyy kolorit*,' i.e. their 'national,' that is, traditional character. The archers wore traditional Buryat costumes, used traditional bows, shot at the traditional targets, and when they hit the targets properly, they had sung to them the bara, the traditional praise song.<sup>787</sup> And another traditional feature of Buryat archery was retained as well: by no means did only young athletes participate. The age of the participants could—and, in fact, sometimes did—

---

<sup>783</sup> Gorbunov, "Zveni tetiva!" 48–49.

<sup>784</sup> See e.g. A. D. Urzhanov, "Tezisi lektsii prof. G. Ts. Tsybikova o natsional'nykh prazdnikakh buryat," in *K stoletiyu so dnya rozhdeniya professora G. Ts. Tsybikova*, ed. A. P. Okladnikov (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1976), 204.

<sup>785</sup> Sandanov, "Surkharban—massovyy sportivnyy prazdnik buryatskogo naroda," 94.

<sup>786</sup> German Namzhilov, "Khanda-Tsyren Gombozhapova: Olimoiyskim chempionom nuzhno rodit'sya," *Sport Tamir*, June 2, 2010: p. 3

<sup>787</sup> V. Badmayev, "Naryadnyy prazdnik Surkharban," *Pravda Buryatii*, July 9, 1981: p. 4.



range from eight to eighty; and, as experience is highly advantageous in this sport, the elderly often outperformed the youngsters.<sup>788</sup>

Furthermore, sur-archery competitions were also included in the programs of the “Spartakiades of National Sports of the Peoples of Siberia and the Far East,” which were organized annually in one of the national autonomous republics, provinces, or regions of Siberia from 1962 onwards. At these events, competitions in both international archery and sur-archery were held.<sup>789</sup> And competitions of the latter kind were even organized on an international level, as such archery matches became a tradition between Buryatia and Mongolia and between Buryatia and Kazakhstan in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>790</sup> Needless to say that in all of these competitions Buryat archers performed very well.<sup>791</sup>

The spreading of international archery among the Buryat archers induced, however, some changes in the shooting techniques in Buryat traditional archery. In the 1960s and 1970s, in a seemingly slow but steady process, more and more Buryat archers abandoned their traditional *Mongolian release* of the arrow and instead switched to the so-called *Mediterranean release*, which is exclusively performed by archers in modern, international, ‘Olympic’ archery. When using this release, the string is drawn and held by three fingers—the index, the middle, and the ring finger—with the arrow lying between the index and the middle finger. In the Mongolian way, the string is drawn with the thumb supported by the index finger, the latter, however, not touching the string.<sup>792</sup> This means that, because in this technique the string is touched by only one finger, it is less disturbed in the moment of the release than it is in the Mediterranean technique, in which three fingers disturb its movement. However, the latter technique has the great advantage that one can, as termed in archery terminology, *anchor* in a much more stable way. By pressing the hand that draws the string underneath one’s jaw, and thus having the string touch one’s lips and nose, one can keep one’s head absolutely straight, which altogether allows

---

<sup>788</sup> See e.g. “Traditsionnyy prazdnik “Surkharban,”” anonymous writer, *Dzhidinskaya pravda*, July 8, 1964: p. 3; Shornikov, “Metkaya strela,” 34; Karavayev, “Strely nad stadionom,” 16; V. Badmayev, “Kryl’ya narodnogo prazdnika,” *Pravda Buryatii*, July 8, 1980: p. 4; and V. Badmayev, “Naryadnyy prazdnik Surkharban,” *Pravda Buryatii*, July 9, 1981: p. 4.

<sup>789</sup> V. Badmayev and B. Miromanov, “Po-be-da!” *Pravda Buryatii*, August 2, 1972.

<sup>790</sup> Batozhap Bal’chinov, “Strel’ba iz luka—drevniy vid sporta,” *Krasnaya Selenga*, March 24, 1978: p. 4; Govorkov, “True to Age-Old Traditions,” 87.

<sup>791</sup> Sandanov, *Fizicheskaya kul’tura i sport v Buryatii*, 141.

<sup>792</sup> Edward S. Morse, *Ancient and Modern Methods of Arrow-Release* (Salem: 1885), 16–17; idem, *Additional Notes on Arrow Release* (Salem: Peabody Museum, 1922), 4–6.

for a better aim than the Mongolian way. In the latter, one must incline one's head sideways, and one's hand and the string are in a significantly less firm and stable (and sometimes even without any) connection with one's head—that is, with one's body. This makes aiming more difficult than in the Mediterranean release. Therefore, for the vast majority of Buryat archers, the latter technique became favored, but not for all of them. In old photographs depicting Buryat archers (and of which we know when they were taken), one can observe that in the course of the 1960s and 1970s, more and more of the archers switched to the Mediterranean release.<sup>793</sup> However some stuck to the Mongolian release and even today one can occasionally see Buryat archers who still use this technique.

Another feature, which Buryat archers, and regardless of their age, have borrowed from modern, international archery, or, more precisely, from modern bows, is target sights. The above described traditional Buryat bows did not have any kind of sight. But, as to use one makes aiming indubitably easier, Buryat archers began affixing onto their traditional bows some sort of sight no later than in the 1970s.<sup>794</sup> This could be simply a yarn wrapped around the bow stem at its handle section or a rubber ring stretched around it. Both could be moved up and down, that is, adjusted like a sight. Some archers also attached some kind of arrow rest onto their bows, instead of laying the arrow on the hand that holds the bow. Most commonly they either carved a little notch into the bow handle in which the arrow could rest, or affixed onto it an arrow rest made of a wire or a piece of leather. This technique, significantly improves the accuracy of a bowshot and most Buryat sur-archers still make and use such simple target sights and arrow rests today. I will come back to this further on.

Summarizing the developments described so far in traditional Buryat archery in the Soviet period, we can say that they can be aptly described as a process of a steadily increasing hybridization—i.e. intermixing—of traditional Buryat archery and international archery. Elements of the latter continually increased in this mixture not only in regard to the rules

---

<sup>793</sup> See e.g. V. Badmayev, “Kryl'ya narodnogo prazdnika,” *Pravda Buryatii*, July 8, 1980: p. 4. The Buryat archers' steady process of abandoning the Mongolian release and instead switching to the Mediterranean release can also be detected in paintings and drawings depicting Buryat archers made by Buryat artists in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s. M.-Katharina Lang and Stefan Krist, “Surharban Depicted: An Analytical Double View,” in *Altaica Budapestinensia MMII—Proceedings of the 45<sup>th</sup> Permanent International Altaistic Conference (PIAC) Budapest, Hungary, June 23–28, 2002*, ed. Alice Sárközi and Attila Rákos (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2003), 202–4.

<sup>794</sup> Nikolay Yan'kov, “Prazdnik luka,” *Nedelya*, no. 19 (1973): p. 23.

according to which these archery competitions were carried out from 1952 onwards, but also in regard to the shooting techniques and the used bows. This was most visible in the increasing practice of completely abandoning the use of traditional Buryat bows—even the described modified ones—for traditional Buryat archery, and instead using modern plastic bows for this type of archery also. This became common practice and was done by most archers at state organized Surkharban festivals until fairly recently. The same is true for the archers' attire: from the 1980s onwards less and less of them wore traditional Buryat garb; in fact, almost none of them did.<sup>795</sup>

In general, one has to say that in Buryatia there was a flip side to the great successes of Buryat archers during the Soviet period. Not only could archery not be revived in regions where it had sunk into oblivion earlier, but it also began to wither on the vine in other regions in approximately the last two decades of this period. In more and more districts of the Buryat Republic, it was no longer practiced on a regular basis.<sup>796</sup> Therefore, in some cases archery competitions at the Surkharban festivals became almost mere seniors' activities or disappeared from the festivals' programs altogether and were replaced by competitions in small bore rifle and pistol shooting.<sup>797</sup> It also occurred that the Surkharbans—including even the central and final ones in Ulan-Ude—were scheduled for the same days at which the best archers had to compete far away at national competitions, thus making the traditional Buryat archery competitions at the Surkharbans second-rate events.<sup>798</sup>

Last but not least, it is important to mention that Buryat bow making vanished in those years, as no steps were undertaken to keep it alive. One master bowyer after the other took his knowledge to his grave without having it passed on to somebody else beforehand.<sup>799</sup> As a bitter irony, due to the increasing failure of the Soviet planned economy in the last two decades of the

---

<sup>795</sup> Lang and Krist, "Surharban Depicted," 202–4; Stefan Krist and Alena Kabunova, "O buryatskom sportivnom prazdnike Surkharbaan kak syuzhete izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva," in *Buryaty v kontekste sovremennykh etnokul'turnykh i etnosotsial'nykh protsessov. Traditsionnaya kul'tura, narodnoye iskusstvo i natsionaln'yye vidy sporta buryat v usloviyakh polietnichnosti*, vol. 1 (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'sko-poligraficheskiy kompleks FGOU VPO VSGAKI, 2006), 389–90.

<sup>796</sup> "Zavtrashniy den' mergenov," *Pravda Buryatii*, October 28, 1970; Batozhap Bal'chinov, "Strel'ba iz luka—drevniy vid sporta," *Krasnaya Selenga*, March 24, 1978: p. 4; Babuyeva, *Material'naya i dukhovnaya kul'tura buryat*, 199.

<sup>797</sup> See e.g. B. Yabzhanov, "Nash prazdnik 'Sur-Kharban', trudovoy i sportivnyy," *Sayany*, July 8, 1971: pp. 2–3; L. Parpayeva, "Surkharban—prazdnik molodosti i truda," *Znamya truda*, July 7, 1977: p. 3.

<sup>798</sup> See e.g. V. Badmayev, "Naryadnyy prazdnik Surkharban," *Pravda Buryatii*, July 9, 1981: p. 4.

<sup>799</sup> Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 381; Babuyeva, *Material'naya i dukhovnaya kul'tura buryat*, 199–200.

Soviet Union, this loss could then also no longer be ‘compensated’ by a sufficient supply of modern plastic bows for the archery clubs. Neither could the Soviet authorities manage to get going a domestic production of such bows in a satisfying quality nor was there enough money available to buy the needed amount of them from abroad.<sup>800</sup> As a result, Buryat archers suffered a lack of both traditional and modern bows for several decades.

In conclusion, the Soviet authorities’ endeavors and policies with respect to archery in Buryatia and the Buryat Autonomous Regions were diversely successful and had diverging outcomes, resulting in an overall ambivalent situation. In a number of regions both traditional Buryat and international archery flourished and became the most popular sports. Yet, in other regions traditional Buryat archery vanished into oblivion and international archery could not be established either. In regard to traditional Buryat archery in particular, it could be preserved, but was in a process of decline. It also changed in some significant ways, as several features of international archery were incorporated into it and/or taken up by individual archers.

### *Archery among the Buryats in the post-Soviet period*

The breakdown of the Soviet Union and the rapid and dramatic political and socio-economic changes which followed did not have equally rapid and dramatic effects on archery among the Buryats. This is especially true regarding the international archery style; it was unabatedly practiced everywhere where it had been practiced before, and not in any different way. Even in the economically (and socially) catastrophic years in the mid-1990s, this did not change. As described above, one was already used to material difficulties, including a lack of basic equipment (including the most basic—bows!). Notwithstanding these difficulties, Buryat archers continued to perform successfully in national and international competitions. For instance, Bal’zhinima Tsyrempilov (one of the students of above mentioned Shagdar Khazagaeyev) became Russian champion in 1994, 1997, and 1999, European champion in 1996, 1998, 2000, and 2008, won the bronze medal in the world championship of 2000, the silver medal in 2007, and participated (so far) in four Olympic Games—1996 (Atlanta), 2000 (Sidney), 2004 (Athens), and 2008 (Beijing). But he is just the most successful of the Buryat archers so far. There have been numerous others, male and female, who have also won medals and reached top results at

---

<sup>800</sup> See Boris D. Sandanov, “Cherez massovost’—k masterstvu,” *Pravda Buryatii*, January 1, 1974.

world and European championships and other high ranking international competitions, and not to mention the national level, which was and still is dominated by Buryat archers. For example, of the sixteen members of the Russian team at the world junior championships of 2004 in Denmark, thirteen were Buryats—seven from the Republic, five from the Aga Region, and one from the Ust'-Orda Region. This team won two gold, eight silver, and one bronze medal.<sup>801</sup> Thus, to sum up, not much has changed as regards international archery among the Buryats in the post-Soviet period: the Soviet success story continued.

Only two, relatively recent, changes are worth mentioning. One is that, due to the improving economy of Russia since the turn of the millennium, the material support of the archery clubs and sport schools which specialize in archery in Buryatia and the Buryat Regions has finally improved as well. One can only hope that this will not be reversed again after just a few years by repercussions of the new fiscal crisis in Russia since 2014.

The second noteworthy development, which also set in about ten years ago, is that Buryat *female* archers made a further, quite considerable, step in regard to their involvement in this sport. They began to outnumber the men and now constitute the majority of Buryat archers. Thus, we can say that they not only finally recaptured their historically equality with the men in archery but even superseded them; and this not only in terms of quantity but also of quality, as in fact the number of Buryat girls and women who participate in high ranking international competitions is now higher than that of Buryat boys and men.<sup>802</sup>

Regarding traditional Buryat archery, developments have also been positive overall in the post-Soviet period, but less smoothly and with some difficulties inherited from the Soviet era and some which newly arose. Right at the onset of the brief period of political liberalizations in the late-Perestroika period, Buryat archers tried to *re*-traditionalize this sport. In 1990, above mentioned Dashi-Nima Erdyniyev used in the competitions in which he participated, and which included the '*veterans*,' i.e. seniors' competition at the main Surkharban in Ulan-Ude, for the first time a traditional Buryat bow (and did very well, as he could win that competition).<sup>803</sup> He was one of the many among the active archers, trainers, and officials who called for using the

---

<sup>801</sup> Stefan Krist, "Est' li buryaty v Avstralii," *Sport Tamir*, March 25, 2006: p. 4; Vladimir Yesheyev jr., personal communication, Ulan-Ude, July 2004.

<sup>802</sup> Stefan Krist, "Kickboxing, Breakdance and Pop Music versus Wrestling, Round Dance and Folk Music?" *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 41 (2009): 134.

<sup>803</sup> Valeriy Sydeyev, "Pod devyat'yu znamenami predkov," *Pravda Buryatii*, July 11, 1990: p. 4.

traditional Buryat bows again and for being vigilant about keeping (or *remaking*) Buryat archery as traditional as possible. When participating in a competition, he always wore traditional Buryat garb—a *degel*-coat and a *malgay*-hat (with a beautiful fur brim)—and untiringly sang the bara, the traditional praise song, every time after one of his opponents hit a sur.<sup>804</sup> I could witness and enjoy this multiple times myself, as he was participating in the seniors' competitions at the Surkharbans in Ulan-Ude until fairly recently. In regards to his bow, however, he, too, did not completely adhere to the tradition, because he also had made on it both a simple target sight and a simple arrow rest of the types described above.

These little modifications, which, as stated above, practically all Buryat archers who used a traditional Buryat bow, have been making for decades, are, in a strict sense, at odds with the intended re-traditionalization. They, however, constitute only a minor issue in this regard. The much more serious problem was and still is the severe shortage of the bows themselves. As mentioned, the Buryat master bowyers died out already three or more decades ago. Moreover, even those who today at least can still *repair* such bows have become so few that they “can be counted on the fingers of one hand,”<sup>805</sup> and, in addition, most of them are already of an advanced age. All attempts of younger enthusiasts to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for making a traditional Buryat bow have not yet been very successful either. Even in the archery mad Aga Region, where this has been tried by a whole group of young enthusiasts, from the turn of the millennium onwards,<sup>806</sup> it had not led to the desired success. They could only come up with ‘making’ bows which only *looked* like traditional Buryat bows by just modifying certain, mostly older, models of plastic bows, from which they removed the target sights and onto which they glued birch bark. This is still done today, and not only by people in the Aga Region, but also by some in the Buryat Republic. One of them is Tsyren-Dorzhi Namdakovich Magakov, whose knowledge about bow, arrow, and sur making informed my descriptions above. His bows of this kind are much appreciated by many Buryat archers today, and thus became widespread among

---

<sup>804</sup> Valeriy Sydeyev, “‘O, letniy prazdnik Surkharban! Zdes’ neba siniy okean ...’,” *Sport Tamir*, July 17, 2004: p. 4; Sayana Mansheyeva and Ayuna Gabaguyeva, “Pervyye mezhdunarodnyye Baykal’skiye igry korennykh narodov ‘Korin-2006’: Dnevnik igr,” *Agenstvo sporta*, No. 1, March 2006: p. 14.

<sup>805</sup> Vladimir A. Fomin and L. S. Khandazhapov, “Problemy vozrozhdeniya natsional’nykh vidov sporta buryat,” in *V Mezhdunarodnyy kongress “Chelovek, sport, zdorov’e”, 21–23 aprelya, g. Sankt-Peterburg, Rossiya: materialy kongressa*, ed. V. A. Taymazov (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel’svo “Olimp-Sankt-Peterburg”, 2011, 174.

<sup>806</sup> Gombozhapova and Kalmykov, *Srel’ba iz luka: istoriya i sovremennost’*, 40.

them.<sup>807</sup> Other bows which they use are Polish, Hungarian, and Korean ones, as those also have an appearance reminiscent to that of a traditional Buryat bow and can be made to look like one by making similar modifications.<sup>808</sup> Last resorts constitute Mongolian bows, but they, albeit coming close in their appearance to traditional Buryat bows, are rather disliked by Buryat archers, because they consider them as much too bulky and clunky.<sup>809</sup> (As outlined above, Buryat bows have always been lighter, shorter, and more elastic than Mongolian bows.)

The reason why today Buryat archers either use the disliked Mongolian bows or—much more often—the fake ‘Buryat’ bows of the described types is because the rules established for traditional Buryat archery force them to do so in case they do not have an original Buryat bow (which, as explained above, practically nobody anymore does). These rules stipulate the use of bows made of wood, horn, sinews, and birch bark (i.e. traditional Buryat bows), but also allow Mongolian and other bows, whose shape and size equals that of a Buryat traditional bow.<sup>810</sup> They were enacted—like those for traditional Buryat wrestling—in the second half of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Before that, at the state organized Surkharban festivals such strict traditionalistic rules had applied only to the ‘veterans’, i.e. the seniors’ competitions. In them men and women participated in the same event and all of them had to wear traditional Buryat garb and—ideally—use traditional Buryat bows. These ‘veterans’ competitions’ were introduced and added to the program of the annual central Surkharban as part of the aforementioned re-traditionalization efforts in 1990 and have been carried out at these holidays ever since.

To the ordinary men’s and women’s archery competitions at the Surkharbans these rules did not apply until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Until then, they were carried out in the described hybrid form: the targets were the traditional sury, and thus the arrows the traditional, blunt bolsu; however, the archers used modern plastic bows and did not wear

---

<sup>807</sup> Nadezhda R. Garmayeva, personal information, Kurumkan (Buryatia), July 2011; Tsyren-Dorzhi N. Magakov, personal information, Ulan-Ude, July 2011.

<sup>808</sup> These include the attachment of two tebkhe, the typical Buryat and Mongolian wooden bars over which the string runs (see above, p. 183). Aryuna Zhambalova, “Problemy natsional’nego luka,” *Novaya Buryatiya*, July 12, 2010: p. 24.

<sup>809</sup> Fomin and Khandazhapov, “Problemy vozrozhdeniya natsional’nykh vidov sporta buryat,” 174; Nadezhda R. Garmayeva, personal information, Kurumkan (Buryatia), July 2011.

<sup>810</sup> “Pravila strel’by iz luka po suram,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 28, translation mine; “Polozheniye o provedenii sorevnovaniy po natsional’nym vidam sporta ‘Eryn gurban naadam’, posvyashchennykh prazdniku svyatyini ‘Zandan Zhuu’,” *Sport Tamir*, July 21, 2010: p. 4.

traditional Buryat garb but the worldwide among archers customary white sportive attire.<sup>811</sup> Today, since these rules were imposed on them as well, the participants of the men's and women's archery competitions at the state organized Surkharban festivals also wear traditional garb and use traditional Buryat bows or, more frequently, such traditionalized bows as described above. It is, however, important to note that these rules by no means apply to every archery competition in Buryatia and the Buryat Regions, as they—logically—do not apply to competitions in international archery, which are of course carried out in accordance with the rules of the WA, the World Archery Federation.<sup>812</sup> Today, however, competitions in which the Buryat archers do compete in compliance with the traditionalistic rules have already become more numerous.

These competitions are organized by the Buddhist clergy and mostly accompany major Buddhist ceremonies and festivities in or next to the *atsans* (the Buddhist monasteries). They are held also at other places and on such occasions as, for instance, consecrations of new *suburgany*, i.e. Buddhist stupas, whose number keeps constantly growing in Buryatia and the Aga Region.<sup>813</sup> Thus, in the course of the season, which starts in April and ends in September, at least twenty such competitions are organized by the Buddhist clergy, and in all of them quite considerable prizes can be won—sometimes money, sometimes a car, but more and more often a race horse or a greater number of sheep. Thus, just as for traditional Buryat wrestling, the Buryat Buddhist clergy, headed by Khambo Lama Ayusheyev, also took the leading role in the fostering of traditional Buryat archery. In theological terms, they—just as they did with Buryat wrestling—linked also archery with a Buddhist deity. This is the Buddhist god of wisdom, the sharp-witted Bodhisattva Manjushri, who therefore is the protector of the sharp-sighted archers, who, in turn, should conceive practicing archery as a means for obtaining such wit, as such is necessary for staying on the path towards enlightenment. And indeed, many Buryat archers affirm that mental powers are as necessary for success in archery as are physical skills, and that

---

<sup>811</sup> See e.g. Andrey Danchinov, "Surkharban-2001. Pervyy v tret'em tysyacheletii," *Inform Polis*, July 4, 2001: p. 12.

<sup>812</sup> Commonly better known by its former (French) name FITA (*Fédération Internationale de Tir à l'Arc*).

<sup>813</sup> For example, in just the Kurumkan District—one of the Buryat Republic's 21 districts, about 4,800 square miles large and with a population of just slightly over 14,000—there have been fourteen *suburgany*, i.e. stupas, by 2012, all of which built in the post-Soviet period. See "Khonkho-Suburgan u Ikatskogo khrebta," *Molodëzh' Buryatii*, August 8, 2012: p. 19.



this also holds true for life in general. Thus, just as with wrestling, for many Buryats archery also has deep spiritual and moral meanings.

However, regarding the more mundane affairs in Buryat archery, there have been considerable disagreements—among the archers themselves, between them and officials, and between different officials—some of which are still not resolved. For the most part, these disagreements concern the rules of the competitions and are fought out mainly between the Buddhist clergy and officials of the state’s sport authorities.

Regarding the bows which can be used in traditional Buryat archery, the compromise described above could be achieved, which was not that difficult as there is not much of an alternative. However, for a long time no agreements at all could be achieved, and some disagreements still remain today, about the distances from which the archers have to shoot and how many sury should be placed and how many points they should count. As a result, the archers had to adapt to different rules in nearly every other competition for years, and this has changed only slightly in the most recent past. The distances still vary between 30 and 60 meters (approximately 33 and 66 yards respectively), with the state organized competitions tending to distances at the lower end of this range and the ‘Buddhist’ competitions tending to distances at the upper end of this range, as Khambo Lama Ayusheyev’s declared aim is to finally establish a distance of even 75 meters (82 yards). The archers themselves are split over this question. Some think that longer distances make the sport unattractive, as they make it too difficult to hit the targets, and thus too frustrating of an experience for many. Others, on the contrary, feel ridiculed when they have to shoot from, as they say, ludicrously short distances.<sup>814</sup>

Concerning the sury, they vary not only in size, weight, and the material they are made of, but also in their quantity. The variations in size, weight, and material, seldom cause discontent, as they always have been slightly different from region to region, and even from person to person who has made them, but usually stay in a range acceptable for everyone.<sup>815</sup> Regarding their number, however, resentments arose several times, after the ‘Soviet’ system of the nineteen numbered sury was no longer followed everywhere in the post-Soviet period. For instance, when

---

<sup>814</sup> Aryuna Zhambalova, “Problemy natsional’nogo luka,” *Novaya Buryatiya*, July 12, 2010: p. 24; Erdyniyev, “Nuzhny li takiye pravila?” 45.

<sup>815</sup> I witnessed discontent in regard to the sury themselves only once. This was at the international all-Buryat *Altargana* festival in Ulan-Bator, Mongolia, in 2010. There, some of the archers considered the sury which were used as too heavy.

in the archery competition after the *maydar khural* (one of the most important sacred Buddhist ceremonies in the course of the year)<sup>816</sup> at the datsan of Ivolginsk in 2003, the archers had to shoot at only one sur, most of them were not overly excited about this. However, at least one other frequent cause of discontent could be prevented by this: as it was only one sur, it didn't matter how many points it counted. In many other cases, it was precisely this question which raised controversies.

Since about the turn of the millennium, more and more often the above described *lasti*, a thin sur with a red tassel on top, and positioned upright in the center of the row of sury, reappeared as target in the competitions. Its use was first resumed in the Aga Region. This re-tradionalization was welcomed by many, however the points system, which first came with it, was not. As was traditional, the *lasti* counted two points and each of the other sury uniformly one point, regardless of how far from the central *lasti* they were positioned. Thus, if an archer hit the sur next to the *lasti*, i.e. very close to the center (and would thus have gotten nine points in the 'Soviet' system), and his opponent hit the sur at the outer end of the row, i.e., hardly hit the target at all (and would thus have gotten in the 'Soviet' system just one point), they both, according to this newly (re)introduced, system, got equally one point. Understandably, many archers were dissatisfied with this.<sup>817</sup> About ten years ago, the system was slightly modified in their interest. Now the *lasti* counted three points, the sur to the right and the one to the left of it, respectively, two points, and all the others one point. Usually thirteen sury were set up. Thus, from left to right, the value of the sury was 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 3, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1. This became the most widespread system and is the one most often used today. For some archers, this is still nothing else but leveling down better performing archers, and in terms of mathematics they are right. Others, however, appreciate that this system allows for easier compensating misses and bad shots. And they are right too, because this system indeed allows for spectacular comebacks, which, in turn, make the competitions more interesting for the spectators to watch. The increasing popularity of Buryat archery in Buryatia and the Buryat Regions in the last years seems to speak in favor of this system. It is, however, as indicated above, still not uniformly implemented.

---

<sup>816</sup> See above, p. 163.

<sup>817</sup> See e.g. Erdyniyev, "Nuzhny li takiye pravila?" 45.

Another, very important reason for traditional Buryat archery's increasing popularity in the last years, yet one which also reveals one more strained situation, must not go unmentioned. This is the role women play in it. Women are very active in all spheres and at all levels of archery in Buryatia and the Buryat Regions. They not only compete very successfully at all levels but are also excellent trainers, event organizers, and usually more accurate judges than the men. And all this applies to both international archery and traditional Buryat archery. Thus, they participate also in competitions of the latter kind, and quite successfully. This, however, creates, as indicated above, a strained situation, because it contradicts the rigid interpretation of Buryat sportive tradition widespread among the Buddhist clergy including its leader Khambo Lama Ayusheyev, who in fact leads the way in this regard too. As it traditionally had been *eryn gurban naadan*, i.e. "three games of *men*," which accompanied Buddhist ceremonies, and because this tradition was revived under precisely this name, Ayusheyev is against the participation of women in the competitions. He argues that, as it is the games of men, it would be a humiliation of them, and thus a disrespect of the divine intentions, if a woman would *win*. He, however, so far could not push through his opinion, as the lamas who organize the competitions allow women to participate, though not in wrestling, but in archery. Yet, to my knowledge, although they perform usually no worse than the men, no woman has ever *won* a competition at a datsan so far.<sup>818</sup>

By contrast, who has won many of them were (male) 'veterans.' In fact, it is fair to say that traditional Buryat archery today, like in former times, constitutes an arena for senior archers, as they most often are in the majority among the participants. Many of them have specialized in this kind of archery. One of them is the aforementioned bow 'maker' Tsyren-Dorzhi Magakov. He has been one of the best traditional Buryat archers in the last ten years or so and continues to achieve top results, notwithstanding that he will celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday this year (2015). His success and that of the many other senior Buryat archers confirm the above statement that, in archery, and particularly in Buryat archery, the experience that comes with age is highly beneficial.<sup>819</sup> It is therefore no surprise that of those who predominantly compete in international archery, it is also chiefly the older and experienced ones who dare to participate in Buryat

---

<sup>818</sup> Oleg Mikhaylov, "Sostyazaniya pod vsevidyashchim okom bozhestv," *Inform Polis*, July 28, 2004: p.15; Valeriy Sydeyev, "Prazdnik buddiyskoy svyatyni 'Zandan Zhuu'," *Sport Tamir*, August 4, 2010: p. 1; Tsyren-Dorzhi N. Magakov, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, July 2011.

<sup>819</sup> See e.g. German Namzhilov, "Prazdnik krasoty, sily i dukha," *Buryatiya*, June 30, 1998: p. 2.

archery competitions. One of them is aforementioned four-time European champion Bal'zhinima Tsyrempilov.

That archers of his caliber participate in these competitions, most of which, as stated above, were and still are organized by the Buddhist clergy, shows the high status these competitions have gained in Buryatia and the Buryat Regions in recent years. What also contributed to this was that the state's sport authorities had jumped on that bandwagon too. They, for example, partially followed the rule changes implemented by Ayusheyev and his fellow lamas. For some years, also at the state organized Surkharban festivals, all archers in all competitions—i.e. not only the veterans, but also the men and women in their competitions—must use 'traditional' bows. Another example constitute the archery competitions which they organized at the biennial all-Buryat *Altargana* festivals held 2004 in the Aga Region, 2006 in Ulan-Ude, 2008 in the Irkutsk Province, and 2012 again in the Aga Region. These large events further boosted the popularity of Buryat archery among both the young and not so young Buryats and among both sexes.<sup>820</sup>

The most recent occurrences which further amplify this development is that wealthy Buryats organize personal *Eryn gurban naadan*—'Three Games of Men'—in honor of one of their ancestors, at which they award the winners of the competitions prizes no smaller than those awarded at games in the Buddhist monasteries.<sup>821</sup> Thus, the number of competitions further increases, as do the prizes, which together attracts more and more archers who want to try their luck. In turn, these numerous and well attended events raise the interest for archery among the youth. In recent years, numerous schools have established for the first time a *seksiya* for archery and the number of girls and boys practicing this sport—and both the international and the Buryat kind—keeps growing almost everywhere in Buryatia and the Buryat Regions.<sup>822</sup> In summary, the revitalization of traditional Buryat archery, though it proceeded and proceeds not entirely without difficulties and dissonances, seems to have been successful. Thus, Buryat archery not only had a glorious past, but will probably have a bright future too.

---

<sup>820</sup> Aryuna Zhambalova, "Problemy natsional'nogo luka," *Novaya Buryatiya*, July 12, 2010: p. 24; Nadezhda R. Garmayeva, personal information, Kurumkan (Buryatia), July 2011.

<sup>821</sup> Tsyren-Dorzhi N. Magakov, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, July 2011.

<sup>822</sup> Nadezhda R. Garmayeva, personal communication, Kurumkan (Buryatia), July 2011.



## Chapter 5:

### *Mori urildaan*—Buryat Horse Races

While living a nomadic way of life—which the Buryats did for most of their history—horses were of utmost importance, both in everyday life and warfare, as both were simply impossible without horses. One could not survive in the steppe without them. Therefore the Buryats, like the Mongols and all other steppe peoples, developed a deep love for these animals, or a close relationship with them as we may say, which reflects in all spheres of their life. In this chapter I will first describe the various crucial roles horses played in Buryat life and then focus on one of them, which is still vibrant today: *mori urildaan*—horse racing.

#### Horses in Buryat life

Like the Mongols the Buryats used to raise five different animals: horses, sheep, cattle, goats, and camels. The most important of those were the horses.<sup>823</sup> First they were needed as means of transportation, not only for moving goods and oneself, but also for moving the herds of the other four kinds of animals, that is, for herding in general. Furthermore, in their traditional nomadic economy the Buryats used all products one can get from horses. From their milk they made *segee*, i.e. kumis—a fermented, slightly alcoholic, refreshing drink—and cheese; horse meat was considered a delicacy (eaten only in winter or on special occasions); horse hides the Buryats used for making bow strings and, when tanned, for making boots, bags, and straps; from horse hair they plaited ropes and lassos; they used horse bones for making bows and arrowheads; and horse dung served as fuel.<sup>824</sup>

---

<sup>823</sup> Johann Gottlieb Georgi, *Bemerkungen einer Reise im Rußischen Reich im Jahre 1772*, Erster Band (Sankt Petersburg: gedruckt bey der Kayserl. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1775), 305; Veronika Veit, “Das Pferd—Alter Ego des Mongolen?,” in *Fragen der mongolischen Heldendichtung*, Teil 3, ed. Walther Heissig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz: 1985), 63.

<sup>824</sup> Georgi, *Bemerkungen einer Reise im Rußischen Reich*, 306; Kapitolina V. Vyatkina, “Kul’t konya u mongol’skikh narodov,” *Sovetskaya etnografiya* 6 (1968): 117; Sh. S. Dashidondokov, “Narodnyye prazdniki aginskikh buryat,” in *Baykal’skiye vstrechi – III: Kul’tury narodov Sibiri: Materialy III Mezhdunarodnogo*

The Buryat horses were small Mongolian horses. However, as the Russians brought their much bigger horses to the region by the seventeenth century, those interbred with the Buryats' horses, which resulted in that the typical Buryat horses became of a middle height of withers.<sup>825</sup> They, however, did not lose the typical traits of the Mongolian horses. Despite the harsh climate, they stay outside and find their fodder themselves all year round and they surpass nearly all other horses in terms of endurance. They can cross distances of nearly a hundred miles per day.<sup>826</sup> Therefore they were, in addition to the excellent bows and archery skills of the Mongols, the main reason of the military successes of Genghis Khan and his descendants' armies.<sup>827</sup>

In her seminal paper, "Das Pferd—Alter Ego des Mongolen? (*The Horse—Alter Ego of the Mongol?*)," German Mongolist Veronika Veit very clearly explains the vital importance horses had for the Mongols (and thus for the Buryats as well):

For a Mongol, to be [with or] without a horse fundamentally decides over life and death. A man and his riding animal, even when out alone in the expanses of the Central Asian highlands, have a chance to survive, thanks to the mobility of the horse and its often better sense of directions and thanks to its warnings of dangers (experiences of which also Mongols of today report); several men, even when together, but without a riding animal, do not have this chance.<sup>828</sup>

For all these reasons, the Mongols and Buryats put their children on horseback as early as age two or three. By the time they were between five and seven years of age, they were already excellent riders.<sup>829</sup>

---

*nauchnogo simpoziuma*, vol. 1, ed. L. S. Dampilova (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'sko-poligraficheskiy kompleks VSGAKI, 2001), 286.

<sup>825</sup> Gerasimova, Galdanova and Ochirova, *Traditsionnaya kul'tura buryat*, 19.

<sup>826</sup> Georgi, *Bemerkungen einer Reise im Rußischen Reich*, 305; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 18.

<sup>827</sup> V. P. Alekseyev, "Domashnaya loshad' Mongolii," in *Arkheologicheskiye, etnograficheskiye i antropologicheskiye issledovaniya v Mongolii*, ed. A. P. Derevyanko and Sh. Natsagdorzh (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1990), 164; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 18.

<sup>828</sup> Veit, "Das Pferd—Alter Ego des Mongolen?," 87, translation and addendum mine.

<sup>829</sup> Antoine Mostaert and Frances Wang, "Social Values and Patterns of Living," in *A Regional Handbook on the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region*, compiled by the Far Eastern and Russian Institute, University of Washington, Seattle (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files 60, 1956), 207; Kabzińska-Stawarz, "Eriin Gurvan Naadan," 78; idem, *Games of Mongolian Shepherds*, 93; Dabain, Sydeyev, Tsybikova and Tsaganov, *Moya Dzhida*, 30.

The great importance horses had for the Buryats also reflects in the fact that of the ‘nine sciences’ a man needed to know or to master,<sup>830</sup> at least four had to do with horses: to plait a whip from eight leather straps, to plait a three leg hobble, to be a good rider, and to be a good hunter; and, if we take into account that saddle making was one of the traditional crafts, of which a Buryat man should master at least one, it is even more than half of these ‘sciences’ which were connected with horses. Furthermore, the Mongols and Buryats’ iconic musical instrument is the *morin khuur*, the two-stringed “horse head fiddle”, which has a carved horse head instead of a violin’s scroll at the end of its neck; and the sleeves of both the male and female traditional Buryat garb coats all have cuffs in the form of a horse hoof.<sup>831</sup> In conclusion we can state, like the Buryats themselves say, that for them without a doubt a ‘man’s best friend’ is the horse.<sup>832</sup>

It is therefore no wonder that horses also play a very important role in the Buryats’ spiritual life. The five domestic animals are divided into two categories: those with a *khaluun*, a “warm” breath, and those with a *khuyten*, a “cold” breath. Horses and sheep belong to the first category, the other three animals to the latter. In a figurative sense *khaluun* means “near” or “related.” Therefore it is always horses or sheep which are sacrificed to the spirits;<sup>833</sup> and in former times horses were given the deceased for taking with them to the other world, which was conceived of being similar to this world, hence it was believed that they needed a horse also there.<sup>834</sup>

As the Buryat shamans also need a horse to travel to the other world or to the sky, they use during their ecstatic séances a stick with a horse head on its upper end and a hint of a saddle and tiny little stirrups. These ‘horses’ enable them to make their mystic journeys.<sup>835</sup> And in the imagination of the shamanistic Buryats also the divine creatures of the sky, the *tengeri*, as well as the benign and evil spirits travel on horseback.<sup>836</sup> Therefore the *serge*, the round tethering posts which the Buryats erect in front of their yurts or houses, at burial sites of shamans, and at

---

<sup>830</sup> See footnote 685.

<sup>831</sup> Vyatkina, “Kul’t konya u mongol’skikh narodov,” 120; Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 76–77.

<sup>832</sup> Pamazhap T. Ochirov, *Zemlya mergenov* (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’skiy dom “Buryaad unen”, 2003), 32; Nikolay Fëdorov, “Morin urildaаn—konnyye skachki,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 37.

<sup>833</sup> Vyatkina, “Kul’t konya u mongol’skikh narodov,” 117–18; Veit, “Das Pferd—Alter Ego des Mongolen?,” 83.

<sup>834</sup> Darima B. Batoyeva, Galina R. Galdanova, Darima A. Nikolayeva and Tat’yana D. Skrynnikova, *Obryady v traditsionnoy kul’ture buryat* (Moskva: Vostochnaya literatura, 2002), 136–37.

<sup>835</sup> Vyatkina, “Kul’t konya u mongol’skikh narodov,” 120; Mircea Eliade, *Schamanismus und archaische Ekstasetechnik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975 [1951]), 431; Veit, “Das Pferd—Alter Ego des Mongolen?,” 81–82.

<sup>836</sup> Veit, “Das Pferd—Alter Ego des Mongolen?,” 81.



dwelling places of protector spirits, and which symbolize the world axis, have three circular indentations. The widespread belief and practice is that the lower one of them is for the horses of the spirits of the underworld, the middle one for the horses of the people of this world, and the upper one for the horses of the *tengeri*.<sup>837</sup> Horses also frequently appear in the Buddhist iconography. The most widespread example are the *khii morin*, the “wind horses”—small white flags with a blue horse printed on them in the center, and other animals, Buddhist symbols, and mantras around it. People in Buryatia bind them on trees or on the roof of their houses, so that they wave in the wind. This, goes the belief, brings them luck and protects them from misery.

Another sphere of Buryat culture in which horses abound is literature. As Veronika Veit states for Mongolian literature, of which Buryat literature can be considered a part of, horses appear in all literary genres: in ritual texts (invocations of spirits, prayers, etc.), songs and ballads, fairy tales, legends, chronicles, and factual literature (for instance manuals for horse breeding), but most prominently in the heroic epics. In these, the hero always has a horse and they resolve almost all problems together.<sup>838</sup> The hero’s horse is not only beautiful, fast, and strong, but also thinks, gives advices, warns, and rescues the hero.<sup>839</sup> Therefore “the hero turns to his horse as to a friend, to a companion, to a comrade equal to himself, and always takes counsel with him.”<sup>840</sup> Here is one example, however one in which the hero behaves not entirely like this, but in the end gets taught a lesson by his horse:

After that the Iron Hero traveled on till he came to a lake. Beyond the lake was a narrow strip of land, and beyond that a second lake, a lake of poison. He took out his horse, and asked: “What are we to do? How are we to cross these lakes?”

“Go back one day’s journey,” said the horse, “and I will spring over the lakes. Hold fast to me.”

They did so. The blue stallion sprang over both lakes; the end of his tail and the tips of his hind hoofs touched the poison water of the second lake, and fell off immediately.

---

<sup>837</sup> Vyatkina, “Kul’t konya u mongol’skikh narodov,” 120; Professor Käthe Uray-Köhalmi, personal communication, Vienna, spring 2000.

<sup>838</sup> Veit, “Das Pferd—Alter Ego des Mongolen?,” 72.

<sup>839</sup> Vyatkina, “Kul’t konya u mongol’skikh narodov,” 119.

<sup>840</sup> Nicholas Poppe, *The Heroic Epic of the Khalkha Mongols*, trans. John Krueger, D. Montgomery and M. Walter, second edition (Bloomington: Mongolia Society, 1979), 129. Cited in Veit, “Das Pferd—Alter Ego des Mongolen?,” 76.

The Iron Hero whipped his horse, and pulled the bridle till blood came. “Why not spring through clean? Thou mightst have fallen into the poison lake, then both of us would have perished!” cried he.

“Till this day thou art a fool,” answered the stallion, “and knowest not that it would have been a sin not to touch the water. We are living people, and must touch things as we pass them.”

“True, I did not know this till now,” replied the Iron Hero.<sup>841</sup>

Thus, to quote once again Veronika Veit,

[...] without the advice (and not to speak of the hands-on help) of their horses, the heroes would get lost in many ways: they would not know what and how to begin, would not reach their goal, would never win the Games of Men for obtaining the bride, would lose in combat and lose their life.<sup>842</sup>

One of the three disciplines of the “Games of Men” the epic heroes could definitely not win without the help of their horses was, of course, the horse race. That such a race appears in practically all these epics indicates both the great popularity and the old age of this sport among the Buryats (and the Mongols in general). This, however, is also proved by historical sources.

### ***Mori urildaan*—Buryat horse races**

As mentioned above, already in the Liao-Shi, the official chronicle of the Liao dynasty, which was ruling over Mongolia from the tenth to the twelfth century CE, reports about horse races can be found.<sup>843</sup> For the thirteenth century, the Secret History of the Mongols reports about such races; and the Moroccan explorer and traveler of the fourteenth century, Ibn Battuta, wrote about horse races as part of funeral ceremonies for Mongolian khans.<sup>844</sup> The latter tradition was typical for all Turkic peoples living in the Eurasian steppes, but seems to have not been kept up by the Mongols very long. What, however, survived among them through the course of history up to the

---

<sup>841</sup> Curtin, *A Journey in Southern Siberia*, 169.

<sup>842</sup> Veit, “Das Pferd—Alter Ego des Mongolen?,” 78, translation mine.

<sup>843</sup> See above, p. 162.

<sup>844</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz, *Games of Mongolian Shepherds*, 84.

present day, are the Naadam- or Naadan-Games, which they organize in honor of their *ancestor* spirits—that is, games, which are also performed in honor of deceased persons.<sup>845</sup> A horse race has always been an absolutely obligatory part of these games. For the Mongols and Buryats, horses by themselves symbolize strength, health, endurance, and life in general; and the trampling noises they produce when they run, and the dust they blow up are believed to frighten away evil spirits.<sup>846</sup> This was what the Mongols and Buryats wanted and needed, and many still want and need today. For most of them the horse race was and still is the most important of the ‘three games of men.’<sup>847</sup>

The oldest historical, i.e. written, source for a *mori urildaan*, a horse race, in Buryatia is a report about a race organized in Kyakhta in 1814 during celebrations in honor of the fall of Napoleon and the capture of Paris. Although this event can in no way be considered a traditional Buryat one, the Buryats occupying the steppe around Kyakhta nonetheless took 105 horses to that race.<sup>848</sup> This, however, is not surprising, because we know from several reports from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, that secular horse races were not uncommon among the Buryats, especially in Trans-Baikalia.<sup>849</sup> However, most typically they were organized as part of the ‘Three Games of Men,’ which were held after every *taylagan*- or *obo*-ritual, that is, after the clans’ sacrificial rituals in honor of their ancestor and protector spirits. In any case, whether in a secular or a sacred context, the races were beloved and very well attended events, attracting up to 3,000 spectators, as stated in one report.<sup>850</sup>

Several weeks, in some cases even months, before the race day, the preparations started. First the owners of horse herds—that is, all decent adult men—chose the horses they wanted to have running the race. Mongols originally used only geldings for this purpose, but by the nineteenth

---

<sup>845</sup> Ibid.

<sup>846</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 72–73.

<sup>847</sup> Yuriy B. Randalov, *Sotsialisticheskoye preobrazovaniye khozyaystva, byta i kul'tury buryatskogo ulusa za gody Sovetskoy vlasti (1917–1961gg.)* (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1967), 56; Tugutov, *Igry v obshchestvennoy zhizni buryat*, 33.

<sup>848</sup> Afanasiy P. Shchapov, “Sibirskoye obshchestvo do Speranskogo,” in *Sochineniya A. P. Shchapova*, issue 3 (Sankt-Peterburg: Knigoizdatel'stvo M. V. Pirozhkova, 1908), 712; Viktor Kharitonov, “Torzhestva v provintsii,” *Novaya Buryatiya*, July 19, 2010: p. 29.

<sup>849</sup> Loginovskiy, “Igry buryat Vostochnago Zabaykal'ya,” 47; I. Ye. Titov, *Konskiye bega v vostochnom Zabaykal'ye* (Irkutsk: Izdaniye Vostochno-Sibirskogo Otdela Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva, 1924), 6.

<sup>850</sup> Titov, *Konskiye bega v vostochnom Zabaykal'ye*, 18; Ayuna Dashiyeva, “Traditsionnaya sportivnaya triada: istoki prazdnika,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 7.

century, the Buryats let run also stallions and mares.<sup>851</sup> To choose them was a science in itself, which, however, many Buryats had down to a fine art. They first looked at the general physique of the horse, then in particular at its head, back, legs, hoofs, crest, and tail, and they paid great attention to the state and characteristics of its jaws, teeth, eyes, ears, nostrils, to the size and shape of its chest and hips, to the proportion between the legs and the body, and many more things. It is said that true experts could recognize the traits of a good race horse already when looking at a young foal. There existed whole treatises about how to recognize a good race horse, but much knowledge and experience in this regard was passed on only orally and some of it, of course, was kept secret.<sup>852</sup>

The latter also holds true for the training methods. However, the basics were common knowledge. How long before the race one had to start with the training depended on the condition of the chosen horse. In some cases four to six days were enough, but usually several weeks of training were necessary, sometimes even two months.<sup>853</sup>

The training was conducted by specialists, the so-called *ladil'shchiki*, who usually worked individually with just one horse. A *ladil'shchik's* first important task was to slim the horse, as it had to lose all superfluous weight, i.e. all fat. This was reached on the one hand by reducing the amount of its fodder, and on the other hand by making it sweat. The most widespread method for the former was to let the horse graze only at night, and bound on a post with a short tether so that it could reach only a certain amount of grass. One, however, made sure that this small pasture was one with high quality grass, especially rich in vitamins. A place was also chosen at least 50 yards away from the yurt or the house to make sure that no smoke from the stove polluted the air the horse was breathing. The sweating of the horse was achieved by covering it with a blanket and riding it with it for several days or even longer. The Buryats knew different kinds of a

---

<sup>851</sup> Urzhanov, "Tezisi lektsii prof. G. Ts. Tsybikova," 204; Veit, "Das Pferd—Alter Ego des Mongolen?," 64.

<sup>852</sup> Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 82; Veit, "Das Pferd—Alter Ego des Mongolen?," 75; Kabzińska-Stawarz, *Games of Mongolian Shepherds*, 93; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 20–21; Dashidondokov, "Narodnyye prazdniki aginskikh buryat," 286; Ochirov, *Zemlya mergenov*, 35; Ayuna Dashiyeva, "Traditsionnaya sportivnaya triada: istoki prazdnika," *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 7.

<sup>853</sup> Khangalov, "Natsional'nyy prazdnik u buryat," 31; Titov, *Konskiye bega v vostochnom Zabaykal'ye*, 14–15; Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 82; Iosif Ye. Tugutov, *Buryatskiye narodnyye igry* (Ulan-Ude: Belig, 1994), 34; Kabzińska-Stawarz, *Games of Mongolian Shepherds*, 97; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 21; Darzha, *Loshchad' v traditsionnoy praktike tuvintsev-kochevnikov*, 39; Ochirov, *Zemlya mergenov*, 35; Nikolay Fëdorov, "Morin urildaan—konnyye skachki," *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 38.

horse's sweat—dirty, foamy, fatty, etc. The treatment needed to be continued until only clean sweat came through the pores of the horse's skin. Only then it had lost all superfluous fat, and purged its body completely from all *shaara*, “slag”, which was necessary for bringing it up to shape for the race. Whereas this treatment might not have been pleasurable for the horse, it otherwise was treated very well. One watered it regularly, washed it thoroughly, provided soft straw to make sure it slept well, and so forth.<sup>854</sup>

After the horse that way was brought into the necessary shape, the actual training for the race began. That was when the jockey came in. This was usually one of the horse owner's young sons or daughters, on average between ten and fourteen years old, but sometimes as young as seven. It was necessary that the jockey and the horse got used to each other. Young boys or girls were taken, because of their light weight. For the same reason they always rode the horse without a saddle—in the training as well as in the race. ‘Working’ as jockey developed the boys’ and girls’ hardiness and audacity but also taught them sangfroid and discipline.<sup>855</sup> The training proceeded that way that the horse was ridden on racing speed over continuously increasing distances, sometimes every day, sometimes with days of rest in between. The aim was that the horse got to running at high speed over long distances with an evenly smooth, rhythmic, and harmonic movement of its body, and—most importantly—also breathing smoothly and rhythmically.<sup>856</sup>

---

<sup>854</sup> Titov, *Konskiye bega v vostochnom Zabaykal'ye*, 15; Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevol'yutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 82; Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 79; idem, *Games of Mongolian Shepherds*, 97; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 21; Darzha, *Loshchad' v traditsionnoy praktike tuvintsev-kochevnikov*, 39; Ochirov, *Zemlya mergenov*, 35; Tugutov, *Buryatskiye narodnyye igry*, 34; Nadezhda B. Dashiyeva, “Kalendarnyye prazdniki buryat (konets XIX – nachalo XX vv.),” in *V mire traditsionnoy kul'tury buryat*, ed. Tat'yana D. Skrynnikova (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs SO RAN, 2007), 126–27; Nikolay Fëdorov, “Morin urildaан—konnyye skachki,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: pp. 37–38.

<sup>855</sup> O. N. Shekherova and A. P. Fedorova, “O roli traditsionnykh buryatskikh prazdnikov v sokhranenii natsional'nykh kul'turnykh traditsiy,” in *Problemy razvitiya muzeyev pod otkrytym nebom v sovremennykh usloviyakh* (Irkutsk: 1995), 152.

<sup>856</sup> Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevol'yutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 82; Tugutov, *Buryatskiye narodnyye igry*, 34; Kabzińska-Stawarz, *Games of Mongolian Shepherds*, 98; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 21; Darzha, *Loshchad' v traditsionnoy praktike tuvintsev-kochevnikov*, 39; Ochirov, *Zemlya mergenov*, 35; Dashiyeva, “Kalendarnyye prazdniki buryat,” 127; Ayuna Dashiyeva, “Traditsionnaya sportivnaya triada: istoki prazdnika,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 7; Nikolay Fëdorov, “Morin urildaан—konnyye skachki,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 38; Fomin and Shokhirev, *Istoriya fizicheskoy kul'tury i sporta Buryatii do 1917 goda*, 22; Bimba Dorzhiyevich Tsibikov, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

On the day of the race, the horses were adorned with colorful cloth straps plaited into their manes and tails.<sup>857</sup> When ridden to the place, where the race would proceed, and where already the large crowds of spectators had gathered, the jockeys sang, with their high children's voices, *giingoo*—special slow songs intended for both calming the horses and putting them into the right mood for the race. Before the race started the horses were ridden to the *dukherik*, the place where the clan elders were sitting, and were introduced to them.<sup>858</sup> Then the jockeys rode the horses to the place where the race was started, which was as far away as was the race distance, because the races were not run on a circle race track, but straight through the steppe.<sup>859</sup> Early on, the race distances became shorter in Buryatia than in Mongolia. There the races are run over distances of 30 kilometers (about 19 miles) or even more. The race in Kyakhta in 1812 was run over ten versts (about 11 kilometers or 7 miles).<sup>860</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century races in Buryatia were usually run over distances between three and five kilometers (2 – 3 miles).<sup>861</sup> This decrease was due to the steady increase of interbreeding Mongolian horses with Russian ones, and perhaps also to the generally increasing Russification of the Buryat culture. After the start of the race the jockeys strived to bring their horse immediately into a leading position, as this was considered a key prerequisite for winning the race.<sup>862</sup> It needs to be mentioned that although boys were often preferred as jockeys, and thus more boys than girls participated in the races, girls in no way performed less proficiently and often won.<sup>863</sup>

After the race was over, the horse which had won was again brought to the *dukherik*. There the same person, who had introduced the horse to the elders before the race, poured *kumis*, i.e. fermented mare's milk, over the horse's head and back, which was an act of highest honoration. After that, a distinguished singer mounted another horse, held with one hand the rein of this horse and with the other, in which he also held a white *khadak*—a silk scarf which Buryats use for presenting gifts to honored persons—the rein of the winning horse. Then he loudly and

---

<sup>857</sup> Dashiyeva, "Kalendarnyye prazdniki buryat," 127.

<sup>858</sup> Shagdaron and Ochirov, "Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat," 472; Tugutov, *Buryatskiye narodnyye igry*, 33; Dabain, Sydeyev, Tsybikova and Tsaganov, *Moya Dzhida*, 30.

<sup>859</sup> Shagdaron and Ochirov, "Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat," 472.

<sup>860</sup> Shchapov, "Sibirskoye obshchestvo do Speranskogo," 712.

<sup>861</sup> Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevol'yutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 82; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 30; Fomin and Shokhirev, *Istoriya fizicheskoy kul'tury i sporta Buryatii do 1917 goda*, 22.

<sup>862</sup> Nikolay Fëdorov, "Morin urilda—konnyye skachki," *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 38; Fomin and Shokhirev, *Istoriya fizicheskoy kul'tury i sporta Buryatii do 1917 goda*, 23.

<sup>863</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz, *Games of Mongolian Shepherds*, 98.

beautifully sang a long song of *solo*, i.e. of “praise,” to the horse. The lyrics of these songs followed standard patterns, but were every time spontaneously improvised, that is, tailored to the particular horse which had won.<sup>864</sup> After the singer had finished, the horse owner’s name was loudly announced, and he was awarded prize money.<sup>865</sup>

The latter shows that by then—i.e. the late nineteenth century—a monetary economy had already permeated Buryat society. This reflected also in the fact that betting was widespread at the horse races of that time, and often with high stakes.<sup>866</sup> After they came into power, the Soviet authorities condemned, forbade, and fought this habit,<sup>867</sup> yet did not succeed in eliminating it, at least not everywhere or for always. One reliable informant (on whose information I also draw in other places of this dissertation) told me that in his village horse racing bets at the annual Surkharban holidays were common at least from the 1970s onwards. Perhaps this reflects the general political ‘thaw’ in the Soviet Union, beginning in the Khrushchev era.

In earlier periods of the Soviet rule, though, the horse races of Buryatia were significantly changed in comparison with how they proceeded in the Tsarist period. This, most importantly, concerned the horses themselves. Whereas before, as described, mainly horses of mixed Mongolian-Russian breeds participated in the races, more and more pedigree race horses—especially Orlov trotters, but also others—were taken to the races in Soviet times. This had two consequences. First it led to a further decrease of the racing distances. Second, whereas such was unknown before (or at least not reported from anywhere), right from the beginning of the Soviet rule, races in three different *gaits* were organized: gallop, trot, and pace.<sup>868</sup> A good example and one that also shows that these changes occurred early on, is which horse races were organized at

---

<sup>864</sup> Natal’ya L. Zhukovskaya, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, July 5, 2001; Valentina D. Babuyeva, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, July 7, 2004.

<sup>865</sup> Shchapov, “Sibirskoye obshchestvo do Speranskogo,” 712; Shagdaron and Ochirov, “Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat,” 472–73; Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*, 82–85; Tugutov, *Buryatskiye narodnyye igry*, 33; Dashiyeva, “Kalendarnyye prazdniki buryat,” 127; Ayuna Dashiyeva, “Traditsionnaya sportivnaya triada: istoki prazdnika,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 7; Nikolay Fëdorov, “Morin urilda—konnyye skachki,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: pp. 38–39; Fomin and Shokhirev, *Istoriya fizicheskoy kul’tury i sporta Buryatii do 1917 goda*, 23.

<sup>866</sup> Titov, *Konskiye bega v vostochnom Zabaykal’ye*, 6–7; Sotsialisticheskoye preobrazovaniye khozyaystva, byta i kul’tury buryatskogo ulusa, 56; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 25–26; Ol’ga B. Buksikova, *Traditsionnyye igry buryat v kontse XIX – nachale XX vv. i opyt ikh transformatsii v natsional’noy khoreografii* (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’sko-poligraficheskiy kompleks VSGAKI, 2004), 19; Nikolay Fëdorov, “Morin urilda—konnyye skachki,” *Surkharban*, one-issue magazine published in 2008: p. 39.

<sup>867</sup> Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 45.

<sup>868</sup> Tugutov, *Buryatskiye narodnyye igry*, 34.

the first District Surkharban of Kyakhta in 1926. It was three races over eight, four, and two-and-a-half versts, respectively, in which gallopers, trotters, and pacers had to participate.<sup>869</sup> The distance of the single horse race held at the Surkharban of Odessa in Cis-Baikalia in 1927 was also just two-and-a-half kilometers (i.e. just a bit over one-and-a-half miles).<sup>870</sup> Also already in the 1920s other equestrian sports, which the Buryats had not practiced previously, were introduced in Buryatia: show jumping and vaulting. These were introduced by the members of the cavalry battalion of the Red Army stationed in Verkhneudinsk.<sup>871</sup> At the same time, the use of racing saddles also became widespread due to Russian influence. In short, horse races in Buryatia became very similar to standard horse racing prevalent all over the world. The racing distances varied mostly between 1,600 and 2,400 meters (ca. 1,700 – 2,600 yards) and the horses were most often of Russian, Arab, or English pedigree breeds for particular gaits.<sup>872</sup>

This, however, did not much decrease the Buryats' love for horse racing. Despite the drastic decline of the number of horses in general due to the increasing mechanization of agriculture and transportation in the course of the twentieth century, the breeding of race horses was upheld in many areas of Buryatia, even in economically difficult periods like the post World War Two years. There are several reports of amazing horse races from the 1950s, a time in which the Soviet authorities even stipulated the extinction of horses, as they considered them being anachronistic for 'modern life.'<sup>873</sup> One example, which also shows that the events were still very much embedded in normal rural life, is that of a race at the District Surkharban of Zakamensk in Southern Buryatia in 1950. There a (locally) famous, black racing horse won the race, although it had to jump during the race over a cow, which tried to cross the race track, but got somehow stuck right in the middle of it.<sup>874</sup> At that time, only in few places horse races were abandoned at the Surkharban festivals,<sup>875</sup> as many kolkhozes, despite all modernization efforts, still kept horse herds "with amblers, geldings and stallions specially set aside for racing purposes."<sup>876</sup> In general

---

<sup>869</sup> K. Tkacheva, "Pervyy surkharban," *Krasnaya Selenga*, March 31, 1988.

<sup>870</sup> Trebukhovskiy, *Sur-kharban balaganskikh buryat*, 6.

<sup>871</sup> Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 58; Dabain, Sydeyev, Tsybikova and Tsaganov, *Moya Dzhida*, 30.

<sup>872</sup> Tugutov, *Buryatskiye narodnyye igry*, 34.

<sup>873</sup> Valeriy Sydeyev, "Iskusstvo, podvlastnoye oderzhimym," *Sport Tamir*, July 3, 2004: p. 6.

<sup>874</sup> Ochirov, *Zemlya mergenov*, 33.

<sup>875</sup> E.g. in 1958 at the Republic Surkharban (see N. Ivanov, "Sur-kharban v stolitse respubliki," *Pravda Buryatii*, July 17, 1958) and in 1964 at the District Surkharban in Dzhida (see "Traditsionnyy prazdnik "Surkharban"," *Dzhidinskaya pravda*, July 8, 1964: pp. 1 and 3).

<sup>876</sup> Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 381.



the horse races were considered the ‘key events’ at most of the Surkharban festivals throughout the whole Soviet period.<sup>877</sup> In the 1970s, a hippodrome was even built in the capital Ulan-Ude,, a race track with stands for several thousand spectators especially for the annual Republic Surkharban festivals,<sup>878</sup> whose programs always included a number of horse races. In the late Soviet period, nonetheless a decline of equestrian sports could be observed. At more and more local, and even at district Surkharbans, horse races were abandoned.<sup>879</sup>

Like for wrestling and archery, a re-traditionalization process can also be observed in regard to horse racing in Buryatia, since the fall of the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990s. This process has three main characteristics, of which two are interdependent. The latter are the steady increase of the racing distances and the revival of breeding the traditional Buryat horses. The former of these two could be observed already in the 1990s, when races over a distance of four-thousand meters (4,400 yards) became the main events at the Surkharban festivals.<sup>880</sup> The latter took significantly more time. Only in recent years the participation of purebred Buryat horses became a *common* feature of the races again.

As for the various efforts of revitalizing former wrestling and archery traditions, it was the Buddhist clergy who also fostered the re-traditionalization of Buryat horse racing—in particular the breeding of the traditional Buryat horses—more than anybody else. They not only supported private horse breeders (who stepped in for the collapsed kolkhozes)<sup>881</sup>, but several datsans as well as single lamas themselves started to engage in this occupation too. As effective incentive for this both the distances of the races organized by the Buddhist monasteries and the prizes awarded to the winners were significantly increased. For example, at the above mentioned, annual ‘Itigelovian Games’ at the datsan of Ivolginsk, the shortest race is run over a distance of seven kilometers (4.3 miles). This is the race for the one-year-old horses. Two-year-olds have to run fourteen kilometers (8.7 miles), three-year-olds eighteen kilometers (11.2 miles), four-year-olds twenty-one kilometers (13 miles), and five-year-old and older horses twenty-eight kilometers (17.4 miles). The prizes awarded to the winners of the races at these games and at

---

<sup>877</sup> See e.g. “Yarkaya starina v sportivnom kalendare respubliki,” *Molodëzh’ Buryatii*, July 10, 1969.

<sup>878</sup> Fomin and Shokhirev, “Narodnaya sistema fizicheskogo vospitaniya u buryat,” 289.

<sup>879</sup> Babuyeva, *Material’naya i dukhovnaya kul’tura buryat*, 200.

<sup>880</sup> See e.g. Valeriy Sydeyev and A. Tugutov, “Prazdnik ostayetsya s name,” *Buryatiya*, July 7, 1994; p. 5; Andrey Danchinov, “Surkharban-2001. Pervyy v tret’em tysyacheletii,” *Inform Polis*, July 4, 2001; p. 12; Boris Baldanov, “Sport na ‘Altargane-2008’,” *Buryaad unen*, July 16, 2008.

<sup>881</sup> Fomin, “Narodnyye vidy sporta buryat,” 387.

similar events organized by the Buryat Buddhist clergy range from 50,000 rubles (750 US dollars) to 200,000 rubles (3,000 US dollars),<sup>882</sup> which are indeed substantial amounts for Buryat circumstances. It needs to be noted though, that races over the longer distances—21 and 28 kilometers—were sometimes not run, because no or too few horses were available which would have withstood such distances.<sup>883</sup> However, such cases have happened less and less in the last years. Even at the state organized Surkharbans the main races are run over distances of fifteen kilometers since about 2010,<sup>884</sup> and in 2015 the race distance of the main race at the Republic Surkharban was even 21 kilometers.

The third characteristic of this re-traditionalization process is that also several traditional habits and customs were revived. This first involves the riders, as they now are most often again young boys and girls, a practice which was not completely abandoned in Soviet times, but had become rare. Second, the young jockeys most often ride again without saddles, and, third, they sing the *giingoo* again, which had become completely forgotten during the Soviet period. And one more, very beautiful custom has been revived in recent years: the singing of *solo*—the songs of praise. Even at state organized Surkharbans they can still be heard today, and often very beautiful ones, as truly outstanding singers are performing them. Buryats say that both *giingoo* and *solo* are understood, or at least felt by the horses. When they hear the *giingoo*, which is sung to them before every training also, they know that they will have to race now; and when the *solo* is sung to them, they cry tears of joy.<sup>885</sup> It is therefore no wonder—and was even with these particular abilities and emotions of the ‘men’s best friends’ explained to me by a Buddhist lama—that for Buryat Buddhists the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara, is the patron of the horse races.<sup>886</sup>

In summary, it can be said that also the re-traditionalization of Buryat horse racing was successful. Like for Buryat wrestling and archery, this was achieved with the support of the state authorities and the Buddhist clergy with a greater share of the latter, but most of all have

---

<sup>882</sup> Lama Bair Tsybikov, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, August 2012.

<sup>883</sup> See e.g. Valeriy Sydeyev, “Ocherednyye prazdniki sporta ot buddistov Buryatii,” *Sport Tamir*, July 13, 2011: p. 4.

<sup>884</sup> See Boris Baldanov and Valeriy Sydeyev, “‘Surkharban’—prazdnik nashego naroda,” *Sport Tamir*, June 21, 2010: p. 3.

<sup>885</sup> Agraфena D. Ignayeva, personal communication, Atsagat (Buryatia), August 8, 2010; Lama Bair Tsybikov, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, August 2012.

<sup>886</sup> Lama Bair Tsybikov, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, August 2012.

contributed the Buryat people themselves. Especially in horse racing, a sport which requires not only a huge input of time, but also of significant financial resources, this can be clearly seen. It is amazing how the Buryats' love for this sport survived all the hardships of Buryat history and blossoms today, in a time which is difficult again, both politically and economically. It seems that, like the heroes of their epics, the Buryats need their horses, and thus devote themselves to them as best they can.

## Chapter 6:

### The Buryat Traditional Sports Holidays<sup>887</sup>

The three sports the Buryats have mostly been engaged in, historically as well as today, are: wrestling, archery, and horse racing. These are widely believed to belong to people's oldest sportive activities. With more certainty than anywhere else, this is proven for the Inner Asian steppe zone, including the area of Buryat settlement around Lake Baikal. This is the case, because in this area, skills not only in wrestling, a physical exercise and fighting technique requiring *no other means than one's own body*, but also the use of the *weapon*, which bow and arrow constitutes, and the *means of transportation*, which the (domesticated) horse constitutes, were of utmost importance and indeed iconic for people's way of life for thousands of years—earlier and longer than anywhere else in the world. Moreover both achievements which became crucial factors in human cultural development in general, the invention of the bow and the domestication of the horse, may even have been begun in Inner Asia, as has been suggested. In any case, many improvements and refinements of both archery and horse riding were invented and developed in this region—and some of them in particular began development in the Baikal region during prehistoric time as well as later.<sup>888</sup> It is therefore no wonder that, together with wrestling tournaments, competitions in archery and horse races constituted the Mongols', and thus also the Buryats' main sporting activities since times immemorial. These competitions were, and still are, carried out together during festivals called *Naadam* in Mongolian and *Naadan* or *Surkharban* in Buryatia.

---

<sup>887</sup> Some parts of this chapter stem from my article “Wrestling Magic: National Wrestling in Buryatia, Mongolia and Tuva in the Past and Today,” published in *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, 4 (2014): 423–44 (see bibliography), and are—with some little adaptations—reproduced here with permission of the publisher.

<sup>888</sup> See the chapters about Buryat archery and Buryat horse racing above.

## The origin of the ‘three games of men’

As outlined in Chapter 3, since times immemorial, wrestling bouts have been part of shamanistic sacrificial cults with which the people of Inner Asia have been thanking, honoring, and pleasing their protector spirits. Most likely also early on, archery and horse races were incorporated into these cults as well, as these were, as stated, likewise activities fundamental to the people living in the steppe. At least as of the time of the Liao Empire (tenth century CE) we know for sure that competitions in all three of these sports were part of such rituals.<sup>889</sup>

These rituals “intended”—and still (or again) intend today—“to both celebrate and attract wealth, health, and prosperity from the gods of nature and from the ancestors.”<sup>890</sup> Whether the competitions in wrestling, archery, and horse racing follow sacrificial rituals carried out by shamans or by Buddhist monks, their purpose is the same: to bring joy to nature, that is, to the spirits or deities of nature, in other words to present them a gift, which one hopes they will reciprocate. To achieve this goal, one needs to show them in particular that, due to their care and protection, one is well and strong, hence able to present them this gift. Thus, proving the success of the care given by the spirits and deities and showing them its necessity are why the competitions are held.<sup>891</sup> The age-old Buryat belief is that during the rituals and competitions, which together make up the *taylagan* and *obo* sacrificial ceremonies, their ancestral and protecting spirits and deities are invisibly present and, if satisfied with the gifts given and the performances shown to them, will further protect those who gave the gifts and performed the shows.<sup>892</sup> The word “*taylagan*” derives from *taykhu*, which in all Mongolian languages means “to honor,” and/or to “arrange a celebration in honor of somebody or something.”<sup>893</sup> Thus, the sport competitions are bloodless offerings, in other words symbolic gifts to the divine.

In its essence, this form of symbolic gift exchange or, in other words, this attempt to negotiate with the powers of nature, is very similar to the typical rituals of hunting tribes, by

---

<sup>889</sup> See above, p. 162.

<sup>890</sup> Pegg, *Mongolian Music, Dance, and Oral Narrative*, 212.

<sup>891</sup> Cf. Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 53–55, 69.

<sup>892</sup> Nadezhda B. Dashiyeva, “K voprosu o traditsionnykh prazdnikakh v Buryatii,” in *Polevyye issledovaniya instituta etnografii 1980–1981*, ed. Sev’yan I. Vaynshteyn (Moskva: Nauka, 1984), 136; Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 53; N. A. Alekseyev and A. G. Gombozhapov, “Obo takhilgan—gornoye moleniye aginskikh buryat,” in *Etnografiya narodov Sibiri i Mongolii* (Ulan-Bator and Ulan-Ude: 2000), 151–52; Dugarova, “Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik ‘Eryn gurban naadan’,” 13, 16.

<sup>893</sup> Babuyeva, *Material’naya i dukhovnaya kul’tura buryat*, 192.

means of which they try to secure success in hunting. When negotiating with the lords of the forest (or of whatever hunting or fishing ground), they essentially *play*, because during these negotiations, that is, during their rituals, the hunters impersonate strong predatory animals (eagle, lion, etc.) in order to gain these animals' strengths and faculties by way of sympathetic magic.<sup>894</sup> Thus, it is not unlikely that the Buryat sports competitions, especially wrestling, originate in such hunting rituals too. This is all the more likely when we consider that huge battues, i.e. collective hunts, were a frequent undertaking of Mongolian clans and tribes up to the Tsarist and Qing epochs. These events brought together hundreds or even thousands of people. Before and after these hunts, *naadam*—"games"<sup>895</sup>—were organized, that is feasts which comprised competitions in archery, wrestling, and horse races as well as dances, various games of skill, storytelling, and other amusements.<sup>896</sup> The outstanding Buryat ethnographer of the late nineteenth century, Matvey Khangalov, therefore considers the games, which in his days were already organized as stand-alone holidays, the small survivals of those large hunting events.<sup>897</sup>

It is, however, important to note that these collective hunts were also excellent opportunities to practice war techniques and they frequently indeed turned into actual military campaigns.<sup>898</sup>

---

<sup>894</sup> See e.g. Aleksey P. Okladnikov and Vera D. Zaporozhskaya, *Petroglify Zabaykal'ya*, part 2 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1970), 106–7; and Mayny, "Ritual'nyy 'tanets orla'," 185–6; cf. Kabzińska-Stawarz, "Eriin Gurvan Naadam," 55; and Roberte N. Hamayon, "Game and Games, Fortune and Dualism in Siberian Shamanism," in *Shamanism: A Reader*, ed. Graham Harvey (London: Routledge, 2003), 63–66.

<sup>895</sup> Khalkha-Mongolian; in Buryat-Mongolian, the games are called *naadan*. See above, p. XY. Like the German term "Spiel" or the Dutch "spel", both the Mongolian term *naadam* and the Buryat *naadan* mean not only "game", but also "play", "play-act", "playing", etc. This is why to a certain degree the German and Dutch terminologies suit analyses of the *naadam* or *naadan* "games" better than the English terminology. For this purpose the English language's distinction between "game" and "play" is more obstructive than useful.

<sup>896</sup> See e.g. Klements and Khangalov, "Obshchestvennyye okhoty u severnykh buryat," 47; Vladimir A. Fomin and Valeriy A. Strel'nikov, "Ot samobytnykh igr k olimpiyskim medalyam," in *Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost', perspektivy: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, ed. Semën V. Manturov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998), 46; Vladimir A. Fomin and Semën V. Manturov, *Vekovoy put' fizicheskoy kul'tury i sporta v Buryatii* (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs SO RAN, 2002), 6; and Fomin, *Ocherki istorii fizicheskoy kul'tury v Buryatii*, 4.

<sup>897</sup> Khangalov, "Natsional'nyy prazdnik u buryat," 34. With this consideration Khangalov is not at all alone. Many authors consider sports in general to be "ritual hunts." Ellis Cashmore, for instance, writes in reference to Desmond Morris' well-known book *"The Soccer Tribe"* (London: Cape, 1981; see bibliography) that "the predecessors of sport were activities that 'filled the gap left by the decline of the more obvious hunting activities' (Morris 1981). The activities passed through a series of phases, the final one being symbolic in which players represent hunters, the ball is their weapon and the goal the prey. Footballers 'attack' goals and 'shoot' balls. Sport is a disguised hunt, a ritual enactment." Cashmore, *Making Sense of Sports*, 91.

<sup>898</sup> Klements and Khangalov, "Obshchestvennyye okhoty u severnykh buryat," 67 and 233; Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barildaan*, 19.

This is important because it points straightforwardly to the connection that existed between the games and warfare. By practicing hunting techniques, people and horses trained for fighting in war, too;<sup>899</sup> and by practicing wrestling, archery, and horse racing, they developed precisely those physical and mental faculties that men and horses needed for both hunting and war.<sup>900</sup> Some authors therefore argue that the three competitions have their origin in both hunting and the art of war,<sup>901</sup> and they might be right, because clearly hunting and warfare were closely connected.

Matvey Khangalov, however, also points to another type of relation between warfare and the games. He reports that among the Buryats one version that explains the origin of the three competitions was particularly popular. According to this version, at some point in their history, the Buryats finally understood the harmfulness of being continuously involved in feuds and thus substituted them with the much more peaceful competitions, which from then on decided and settled disputes.<sup>902</sup> That in numerous cases described in Mongolian heroic epics conflicts—mainly over the use of pasture land and the possession of cattle herds—were resolved in wrestling matches<sup>903</sup> underpins and corroborates this version.

Also another cause of conflicts, all too frequent all over the world, the Mongols and Buryats tried to avert by means of sportive competitions: to compete for the bride in a triathlon of wrestling, archery and horse racing is not only a widespread motif in the epics,<sup>904</sup> but also reported to have been a real custom.<sup>905</sup> In any case, the Buryats also used to organize *eryn gurban naadam*, the ‘three games of men,’ as *part* of their wedding ceremonies.<sup>906</sup> Other

---

<sup>899</sup> Taube, “Die drei Wettspiele der Männer,” 99; Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 51; Zhukovskaya, *Kategorii i simbolika*, 59; Fomin, *Ocherki istorii fizicheskoy kul'tury v Buryatii*, 5, 7.

<sup>900</sup> N. Pozdnyakov, “Narodnyy prazdnik Mongolii,” *Nauka i religiya* 7 (1961): 84; Taube, “Die drei Wettspiele der Männer,” 99; Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 51; Kapitolina V. Vyatkina, *Ocherki kul'tury i byta buryat* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1989), 199; Darzha, *Loshchad' v traditsionnoy praktike tuvintsev-kochevnikov*, 38; Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barilda*, 19.

<sup>901</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz refers in this regard to Mongolian authors D. Damdin and R. Zorig. Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 51.

<sup>902</sup> Khangalov, “Natsional'nyy prazdnik u buryat,” 33. Cf. also Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 51.

<sup>903</sup> Taube, “Die drei Wettspiele der Männer,” 99–100; Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 51.

<sup>904</sup> Taube, “Die drei Wettspiele der Männer,” 100; Fomin, “Istoricheskiye korni buryatskogo troyebor'ya,” 297.

<sup>905</sup> Babuyeva, *Material'naya i dukhovnaya kul'tura buryat*, 200.

<sup>906</sup> See e.g. Johann Gottlieb Georgi, *Beschreibung aller Nationen des Rußischen Reichs, ihrer Lebensart, Religion, Gebräuche, Wohnungen, Kleidungen und übrigen Merkwürdigkeiten*. Vierte und letzte Ausgabe. Mongolische Völker, Russen und die noch übrigen Nationen (St. Petersburg: Carl Wilhelm Müller, 1780), 431;

important social events, which were usually completed by such games, were the days of hearing of the clans' courts; thus, also this important conflict resolving action was accompanied by the games.<sup>907</sup>

The custom of competing for the bride may also indicate why it had been 'three games of men.' After all, the aforementioned activities from which these games may have originated—performing shamanistic rituals, hunting wild animals and going to war—have by no means been pure male preserves. Among the Buryats have always been both male and female shamans, and as Klements and Khangalov report, women participated in both the large communal hunts and the military campaigns on equal footing with the men.<sup>908</sup> The custom of competing in sports for a girl's hand may also explain why the people of the steppe practiced only individual sports. But these people's nomadic way of life—living in small groups and frequently moving from one pasture to another—provides at least an equally lucid explanation: they gathered in great enough numbers far too seldom to develop team sports.<sup>909</sup>

### **The 'three games of men' in former times (pre-Soviet and Soviet period)**

Several authors have suggested *general* periodisations for the historic development of the sports holidays of the Mongols and Buryats.<sup>910</sup> Although they make sense and do help understanding this phenomenon, I think it is better to tackle it by focusing on the various *functions* the holidays and their competitions have been fulfilling both for the societies as a whole and for certain of their members in particular. Examining how these various specific utilizations have changed over time, I believe, will better reveal the driving forces behind the historical development of the whole complex of the 'three games of men,' and thus make them clearer and easier to understand.

---

Khangalov, "Zegete-aba—oblava na zverey u drevnikh buryat," 25; idem, "Neskol'ko dannyykh dlya kharakteristiki byta severnykh buryat," 181; and idem, "Svadebnyye obryady u buryat," in Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1 (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004), 210, 215.

<sup>907</sup> Klements and Khangalov, "Obshchestvennyye okhoty u severnykh buryat," 83.

<sup>908</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>909</sup> Lkhagvasuren, "Fisicheskaya kul'tura v traditsiyakh gosudarstvennoy politiki Mongolii," 14.

<sup>910</sup> See, e.g., Zhukovskaya, *Kategorii i simvolika*, 59–61; Fomin and Shokhirev, "Osnovnye etapy stanovleniya bukhe barildaan," 136; and Babuyeva, *Material'naya i dukhovnaya kul'tura buryat*, 198–200.



As described above, all of these three competitions have been fulfilling a *magic function* from times immemorial and do so up to the present day. Very vivid examples of this include the statements of Mongolian shepherds whom Polish anthropologist Iwona Kabzińska-Stawarz interviewed in 1978 and 1980. They told her that the games were organized so that “summer or winter [would] be good, [...] Luus sabdag [i.e. their protector deity] not be angry, the rainfall be high and the grass grow” and “for the respect of the deities, so that they [would] bring people wealth, high rainfall and happiness” and that “Luus sabdag [would] give people nice weather in return for their holidays.”<sup>911</sup>

French anthropologist Hamayon explains this particular form of symbolic communication with a protector spirit—or with the spirits of the life-giving nature in general—which is typical for all Mongols and Buryats, with the traditional mixed economy that is characteristic for them. As they are both stockbreeders *and* hunters, they combine two ‘logics’ in their magic, the ‘magic logic’ typical for hunting societies and the one typical for stockbreeding societies. As hunters directly *take* from nature—namely *game*—they directly negotiate with the spirits of nature, i.e. are equal partners in their communication with them, a communication in which both partners try to trick the other, in other words *play* with each other. Therefore the hunters’ negotiators, i.e. their shamans, are essentially *playing*. They are required to imitate the animals which their people hunt, that is, want to *take*, and also to (symbolically) marry the daughter of the spirit (or lord) of nature, which both is necessary to become equal partners in these negotiations or, in other words, in these *games* (of *mimicry*—see Caillois’ classification!—on the part of the shamans). Stockbreeders, on the other hand, *produce* their source of life, i.e. their herds of livestock, and they *inherit* them, thus are not directly *taking* from nature. In other words, for them nature becomes—to use a Marxist notion—a *means* of production. However, unlike capitalist entrepreneurs, they do not own this means. Therefore they have to *ask* the spirits of nature as well as their ancestor spirits to further provide them with this necessary means, that is, to *give* it to them. Hence, they are not equal partners of the spirits, but subordinates to them. Thus, they cannot play with them, but have to *pray* to them; and they cannot take from them, but have to *give* them gifts, in order to win or keep their favor, which they do by sacrificing animals—a horse or a sheep—which they have produced with their help. However, after the sacrificial ritual with the shaman’s *prayer* is over, the Buryats and Mongols also *play* games,

---

<sup>911</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 54, explanatory addenda mine.

including such of animal mimicry (the wrestlers' performances of the eagle dance), thus, they engage in ritualistic activities typical for hunters' 'magic logic.'<sup>912</sup> This they have to do because they are not only stockbreeders but hunters as well. Therefore for them "playing these games is a duty, and not a diversion or a way of [...] amusement."<sup>913</sup>

That Kabzińska-Stawarz could still hear the above quoted views in the late twentieth century is in large part due to how the conversion to Buddhism among the Mongols and Buryats was achieved in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century: in essence, by perpetuating many shamanistic practices.<sup>914</sup> In the case of the *taylagan* sacrificial rituals in honor of the protector spirits, for instance, the Buddhist monks only banned the sacrifice of living horses and sheep, as had been the custom, and gave the ritual a new name: *obo*.<sup>915</sup> Otherwise, the whole ritual remained essentially unchanged. They only replaced the local deities with deities of the Buddhist pantheon, but people prayed and sacrificed—now mainly *tsagaan idee*, "white food," that is dairy products—to them in practically the same way as they had previously made offerings to their local animistic-shamanistic spirits. Moreover, in a manner similar to the sacrificial rituals practiced earlier by shamans, now the Buddhist monks' ceremonies were followed by an opulent feast and the three traditional sports competitions.<sup>916</sup> Furthermore, the Buddhist clergy utilized people's love of those games by organizing them in the context of genuine Buddhist ceremonies, for instance the *maydar khurals*—ceremonies held in summer in honor of the future Buddha Maitrea<sup>917</sup>—or consecrations of new stupas. Also they organized them to honor high-ranking

---

<sup>912</sup> Roberte N. Hamayon, "Shamanism in Siberia: From Partnership in Supernature to Counter-power in Society," in *Shamanism, History, and the State*, ed. Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994, 78–85; idem, "Tricks of the Trade or How Siberian Hunters Play the Game of Life-Exchange," chapter 8 in *Expanding the Economic Concept of Exchange: Deception, Self-Deception and Illusions*, ed. Caroline Gerschlager (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 133–44; idem, "Game and Games," 63–66;

<sup>913</sup> Hamayon, "Game and Games," 64.

<sup>914</sup> See e.g. Adolf Bastian, *Geographische und ethnologische Bilder* (Jena: Hermann Costenoble, 1873), 400; Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 41; Ágnes Birtalan, "Traditionelle mongolische Religionen im Wandel," in *Die ural-altaischen Völker: Identitäten im Wandel zwischen Tradition und Moderne. Vorträge des Symposiums der Societas Uralo-Altaica vom 13. bis 15. Oktober 2002*, ed. Gerson Klumpp and Michael Knüppel (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 16.

<sup>915</sup> Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 374.

<sup>916</sup> Babuyeva, *Material'naya i dukhovnaya kul'tura buryat*, 191; Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barilda*, 23–24.

<sup>917</sup> Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 378; Kabzińska-Stawarz, "Eriin Gurvan Naadam," 47.

lamas. All these ‘Buddhist’ ways of organizing the competitions have recently been resumed in Buryatia.

With regard to the *social functions* these rituals and games fulfilled in the course of history, I already stated above that the nomadic way of life meant that large get-togethers occurred rarely. Hence, those which were organized were of great social importance, as they constituted almost the sole opportunities for any kind of socializing. Establishing new and renewing existing ties, exchanging news, debating matters of common interest, feasting, dancing, falling in love, and competing in various contests—all this was possible almost only on these occasions. Thus, they played a crucial role for maintaining and fostering the common identity and the unity of the group;<sup>918</sup> and this they also do today, even though the nomadic way of life has long since been abandoned in Buryatia. These gatherings mark clan identity because most are events only attended by the members of one particular clan, as they are held in order to honor the *clans’* protector and ancestor spirits, of which every clan has its own, different from those of other clans.

In former times, the number of *taylagan*-rituals a clan organized varied, but usually at least three of them were performed in the course of a year, one in the spring, one in the summer, and one in the fall. Some cis-Baikal Buryat clans, however, held significantly more. For some of them up to twenty *taylagany* (plural of *taylagan*) per year were reported.<sup>919</sup> In addition to cultic requirements, the frequency of them is also directly related to people’s immediate needs, as the number of these sacrificial rituals, which intend to gain the *support* of the spirits, goes up in dry years.<sup>920</sup> In former times, there were also some greater *taylagany*, which were attended by members of several clans, sometimes bringing together several thousand people,<sup>921</sup> but the teams competing in archery at those events were from the different clans and every clan fielded its own

---

<sup>918</sup> Kropotkin, *Gegenseitige Hilfe in der Entwicklung*, 144; Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 80; Babuyeva, *Material’naya i dukhovnaya kul’tura buryat*, 196.

<sup>919</sup> Taras M. Mikhaylov, “Ob obychakh i traditsiyakh buryat v sovremennyy period,” in *Kul’tura i byt narodov Buryatii* (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel’stvo, 1965), 11; Dashiyeva, “Traditsionnyye obshchestvennyye prazdniki buryat,” 4.

<sup>920</sup> Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 373; idem, “Population Trends, Ethnicity and Religion among the Buryats,” 169.

<sup>921</sup> Aleksandra V. Potanina, *Rasskazy o buryatakh, ikh vere i obychayakh*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Moskva: Tipografiya K. L. Men’shova, 1912), 13; Nadezhda B. Dashiyeva, *Buryatskiye taylagany (opyt istoriko-etnograficheskogo issledovaniya)* (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’sko-poligraficheskii kompleks VSGAKI, 2001), 29.

wrestlers.<sup>922</sup> This later changed in the mere sportive holidays, which were organized in accordance with administrative units: as *ulus* (village) or *aimak* (district) games in the late-Tsarist period,<sup>923</sup> and as *kolkhoz*, *aimak*, regional, or republican games in the Soviet period, in which people competed as individuals, as members of work-units, or as inhabitants of administrative units.<sup>924</sup> There were, however, always some *taylagany* carried out, which were still the sole matter of a clan or lineage, even in Soviet times, and some of them were accompanied by the traditional three sports competitions.<sup>925</sup>

The *taylagany* have a social function also in the sense of social caring: during these events, the wealthy provide food to be redistributed to everybody, including the poor. In former times, as mentioned above, wealthy Buryat clan leaders supported chosen wrestlers and furnished them with everything for months-long periods before the holidays.<sup>926</sup>

At the same time, however, this clearly manifested the existing social hierarchies, which the games thus also reinforced.<sup>927</sup> Hence, the festivals contributed—and still contribute today—to the preservation of social situations, including social inequalities. On the other hand, the competitions provide a good opportunity to gain and increase one's social prestige. Especially successful wrestlers have always received very high social recognition.<sup>928</sup> The competitions still retain this function today, especially for the rural youth.<sup>929</sup>

As already mentioned, in former times the games had a significant *military function*, too.<sup>930</sup> This had of course the described practical reason—i.e. the pronounced usefulness that exercising wrestling, archery and horse racing had for war preparation—but also roots in age-old beliefs and cults. The protector spirits of the clans, in whose honor the sacrificial ceremonies were carried out, were also gods of war who, it was believed, defended the clans' territories against evil forces. This is evident, for instance, in the weapons and armors found at Buryat *barisa* and

---

<sup>922</sup> Khangalov, "Natsional'nyy prazdnik u buryat," 31; Batoyeva, Galdanova, Nikolayeva and Skrynnikova, *Obryady v traditsionnoy kul'ture buryat*, 113; Dashiyeva, "Kalendarnyye prazdniki buryat," 133.

<sup>923</sup> Dashiyeva, "Kalendarnyye prazdniki buryat," 128, 131.

<sup>924</sup> Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 381.

<sup>925</sup> Taras M. Mikhaylov, "Shamanskiye perezhitki i nekotoryye voprosy byta i kul'tury narodov Sibiri," in *Voprosy preodoleniya perezhitkov lamaizma, shamanizma i staroobryadchestva*, ed. A. A. Belousov (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1971), 66–67.

<sup>926</sup> Khangalov, "Natsional'nyy prazdnik u buryat," 31.

<sup>927</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz, "Eriin Gurvan Naadam," 80.

<sup>928</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>929</sup> Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barildaan*, 14–15, 152.

<sup>930</sup> See also Lkhagvasuren, "Fisicheskaya kul'tura v traditsiyakh gosudarstvennoy politiki Mongolii," 14–15.

*obo*—sacrificial sites that are believed to be the home of the spirits—and in the fact that weapons and armors were frequently given as prizes to the winners of competitions.<sup>931</sup>

As described above, the collective hunts and the three competitions themselves had been, in their way, military exercises and were therefore used by the clan leaders and khans to recruit their life guards and elite troops.<sup>932</sup> In addition, they also frequently organized *naadam*—i.e. games—after victorious battles. This is reported also of Genghis Khan and his successors on the throne of the Great Mongolian Empire. The games thus also became a symbol of victories of whole clans or tribes or even the empire. Later, in the Soviet period, this symbolism was reinstalled by annually organizing the *Naadam* and *Surkharban* festivals to celebrate the victorious ‘people’s revolutions’.<sup>933</sup> This leads us to the next function the games have abundantly fulfilled throughout the course of their history: *political purposes*.

After the Mongols came under the control of the Russian and the Qing Empires, both these colonial powers utilized their new subjects’ pronounced love of the three competitions for their own political purposes. A lucid, if somewhat baroque example of how the Russian Tsarist government utilized the games, is the earliest report about these games known from Tsarist Russia. This is a report from a clerk in Kyakhta about the organization of the three games within the framework of a feast organized there in 1814 to celebrate the fall of Napoleon and the capture of Paris. Both the Buryats and the Russian settlers had to be commanded to attend the festivities by decree of the governor of the Irkutsk Governorate. Nonetheless, the Buryats, after first attending a Buddhist khural, solemnly pledged their loyalty to the Tsar and drank a toast to the capture of Paris and the fall of Napoleon. Then they carried out their tournaments in wrestling and archery and, on the third day of the celebrations, the aforementioned horse race.<sup>934</sup>

The Tsarist administration’s utilizations, however, seem to not have done any identifiable harm to the games’ popularity. On the contrary, the games still flourished at the beginning of the

---

<sup>931</sup> Dashiyeva, “Kalendarnyye prazdniki buryat,” 129–30; Pegg, *Mongolian Music, Dance, and Oral Narrative*, 222. For more details about the connection between totemic and war cults among the Mongolian peoples see Dorzho V. Tsybikdorzhiev, “Istoriya i etnografiya o natsional’noy bor’be mongol’skikh narodov,” *Buryaad unen*, March 17, 2000: p. 9.

<sup>932</sup> Zhukovskaya, *Kategorii i simbolika*, 59; Bardamov and Fomin, “Vozrozhdeniye natsional’noy traditsii,” 141; Darzha, *Loshchad’ v traditsionnoy praktike tuvintsev-kochevnikov*, 38; Babuyeva, *Material’naya i dukhovnaya kul’tura buryat*, 198; Fomin, Dabain and Namzhilov, *Zolotaya kolybel’ chempionov*, 4.

<sup>933</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 52.

<sup>934</sup> Shchapov, “Sibirskoye obshchestvo do Speranskago,” 710–12; Viktor Kharitonov, “Torzhestva v provintsii,” *Novaya Buryatiya*, July 19, 2010: p. 29.

twentieth century, as a number of ethnographic and other reports about them at the time prove.<sup>935</sup> This is not quite as clear for the following Soviet period.

Like their predecessors in power, the Soviet leaders too, as already stated, utilized the games for their political purposes early on. In the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which, as mentioned above, was founded in 1923, it even started in that same year that the games were organized in some aimak centers as celebrations of the foundation of that republic;<sup>936</sup> and from 1924 onwards, large all-Republic games were held in the capital Verkhneudinsk (later to become Ulan-Ude).<sup>937</sup> These state-organized games were cleansed of all religious components from the beginning. Furthermore, in most parts of Buryatia, the name of the festival was changed. It was now called *Surkharban*, which, as explained above, means in fact only “archery”. Only the smaller group of Buryats living to the west of Lake Baikal used to call the whole feast of the three traditional games by that name; nonetheless, it was decided that from now on the term was to be used uniformly in the whole Republic.<sup>938</sup>

Early on several kinds of *non-Buryat* sports were incorporated into the programs of the ‘Buryat’ Surkharbans. At the first ‘Republic Surkharban’ in Ulan-Ude, in 1924, soccer, basketball and track and field were included,<sup>939</sup> and later even more new sports were added, thereby increasingly internationalizing these holidays, originally intended to be ‘national’ at least in form.<sup>940</sup>

In general, the Surkharban holidays were heavily utilized for state and party propaganda throughout the whole Soviet period. At all of them, “portraits of state leaders and heroes of the revolution,”<sup>941</sup> “‘The Red Flag,’”<sup>942</sup> military parades and even “military manoeuvres,”<sup>943</sup> “long

---

<sup>935</sup> See e.g. Khangalov, “Natsional’nyy prazdnik u buryat” (1880); Kulakov and Molodykh, *Illyustrirovannoye opisaniye* (1896), Loginovskiy, “Igry buryat Vostochnago Zabaykal’ya” (1897); Shagdarov and Ochirov, “Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat” (1909); and also Linkhovoin, *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh Buryat* (1972). See also Lkhagvasuren, “Fisicheskaya kul’tura v traditsiyakh gosudarstvennoy politiki Mongolii,” 16–17.

<sup>936</sup> Vladimir A. Fomin, “Pervyye chempiony bukhe barildan iz Ust’-Ordynskogo okruga,” unpublished manuscript, 1.

<sup>937</sup> Trebukhovskiy, *Sur-kharban balaganskikh buryat*, 3; Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 380; Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 45–6.

<sup>938</sup> Krist, “Where Going Back is a Step Forward,” 107.

<sup>939</sup> Sandanov, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 46.

<sup>940</sup> Krist, “Where Going Back is a Step Forward,” 107–8, 113.

<sup>941</sup> Kabzińska-Stawarz, “Eriin Gurvan Naadam,” 52.

<sup>942</sup> Pegg, *Mongolian Music, Dance, and Oral Narrative*, 213.

<sup>943</sup> Ibid.

speeches, the announcement of plans, awards for outstanding workers, revolutionary songs, demonstrative marches on horseback [...], and the like became central.”<sup>944</sup>

Surkharban festivals were even intentionally organized for anti-Buddhist propaganda purposes. During the anti-religious campaigns and purges from the mid-1920s to the late-1930s, local authorities, as well as branches of the Soviet communist youth organization Komsomol, organized them on the same days that major ceremonies were held in the *datsans*, in order to entice as many people as possible away from the Buddhist ceremonies there.<sup>945</sup>

During the Soviet period, the Surkharbans became festivals in which non-Buryats living in the Buryat(-Mongolian) ASSR and the Buryat National (or Autonomous) Regions, especially Russians, of course, also increasingly participated.<sup>946</sup> Their folklore groups more and more often took the stage and more non-Buryat sports were included into the programs of the festivals, e.g. the above mentioned ball games and track and field and, later—in the 1970s and 1980s—tug-of-war, dumb bell lifting, and even parachuting, motor rallies, moto cross, and the like.<sup>947</sup> Thus, the traditional Buryat holiday developed into a multi-ethnic festivity. Nonetheless, these festivals served as markers of Buryat ‘national identity’ in the particular fashion desired in the Soviet

---

<sup>944</sup> Krist, “Where Going Back is a Step Forward,” 107. Detailed descriptions of such celebrations of Surkharban holidays can be found in various newspaper reports, for example “Traditsionnyy prazdnik ‘Surkharban’,” written by an anonymous writer, published in *Dzhidinskaya pravda*, July 8, 1964: p. 1; and B. Yabzhanov, “Nash prazdnik ‘Sur-Kharban’, trudovoy i sportivnyy,” *Sayany*, July 8, 1971: p. 2; and also in Trebukhovskiy, *Sur-kharban balaganskikh buryat*, 4, 7. See also Emiliya I. Matkhanova, *Bytovyye traditsii v sovremennykh usloviyakh* (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1965), 22; Yuriy B. Randalov, “Obshchestvennyye prazdniki v buryatskikh ulusakh,” in *Voprosy preodoleniya perezhitkov proshlogo v bytu i soznanii lyudey i stanovleniya novykh obychayev i traditsii u narodov Sibiri*, vol. 2 (Ulan-Ude: SO AN SSSR, BION, 1966), 51; idem, “K voprosu o formirovaniy novykh obshchestvennykh prazdnikov v buryatskikh kolkhoznykh ulusakh,” in *Etnograficheskiy sbornik*, vol. 5 (Ulan-Ude: 1969), 18–22; Vyatkina, *Ocherki kul'tury i byta buryat*, 201; and Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 380.

<sup>945</sup> See, e.g., the report of the Aga district committee of the All-Union Leninist Komsomol from August 4, 1926, on the organisation of their Surkharban of that year, published in Vasilii M. Pykin (ed.), *Istoriya komsomola Buryatii. Dokumenty, fakti, imena. 1920–1991*, book 1. 1920–1945gg (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografia, 2002), 67–68. See also Matkhanova, *Bytovyye traditsii v sovremennykh usloviyakh*, 22; Boris D. Sandanov, *Surkharban*, 35–36; idem, *Eryn gurban naadan*, 48; B. D. Dogdome, “O perezhitkakh lamaizma v Aginskom natsional'nom okruge i opyte ateisticheskoy raboty organizatsii obshchestva “Znaniye” sredi naseleniya,” in *Voprosy preodoleniya perezhitkov lamaizma, shamanizma i staroobryadchestva*, ed. A. A. Belousov (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1971), 141; *Ocherki istorii kul'tury Buryatii*, vol. 2, ed. Dashi D. Lubsanov et al. (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1974), 287; Urzhanov, “Tezisi lektsii prof. G. Ts. Tsybikova,” 205; Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 380; and Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barilda*, 60.

<sup>946</sup> Matkhanova, *Bytovyye traditsii v sovremennykh usloviyakh*, 23.

<sup>947</sup> See e.g. “Volny Surkharbana,” *Sovetskiy sport*, August 8, 1986: p. 2; and Aleksandr Zil'berg, “Surkharban–99,” *Sport-ekspress*, No. 8 (32), August 1999: p. 105.

Union. National sports and festivals ‘Sovietized’ to the desired degree served all over the country for showcasing ‘national identities’ understood as partial identities to come second after the overarching Soviet citizenship. Typical examples of such occasions, with the participation of Buryat ‘national’ wrestlers and archers, were the aforementioned Spartakiades of National Sports of the Peoples of Siberia and the Far East, of which the first one was held in Kyzyl, the capital of the Republic of Tuva, in 1962.<sup>948</sup> The Surkharbans were just another example or, as one can say, local variants of that general model of Soviet ‘national’ sports holidays. To the promotion of a ‘Soviet’ Buryat identity—i.e. one ‘national’ only in its form, but ‘socialist’ in its content—also contributed that practically no festivity in the kolkhozes and sovkhozes was held without competitions in the three traditional Buryat sports.<sup>949</sup> They became part of all the new Soviet festivals and celebrations, like those held on May Day—the international (socialist) Labor Day—or the “Day of the constitution (of the USSR)”, or the “Day of the stockbreeders”, the “Day of the machine operators”, the “Day of the Soviet army” and so forth.<sup>950</sup> Thereby, the sports festivals, which formerly had been the matter of kin groups and linked with religious rituals, were made events of the production units and linked with Soviet ideology.<sup>951</sup>

Despite all that, the ‘Republic Surkharban’ introduced in 1924 significantly contributed to the emergence of a national identity encompassing *all* Buryats, as this festival unified western, i.e. cis-Baikal, and eastern, i.e. trans-Baikal Buryats, more than anything else had ever done before.<sup>952</sup> But the event already stopped playing this role in 1937, when, as described above, by decree of the central government in Moscow the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was deprived of large parts of its territory, both in the east and the west, including some areas with particular numerous Buryat populations.<sup>953</sup> From then on the sportsmen and sportswomen from those regions did not participate in the Republic Surkharban, as they did not belong to that republic anymore. Instead they competed—and compete still today—in separate

---

<sup>948</sup> Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barilda*, 34.

<sup>949</sup> Sandanov, *Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport v Buryatii*, 85.

<sup>950</sup> Mikhaylov, “Ob obykhakh i traditsiyakh buryat v sovremennyy period,” 11; Randalov, “Obshchestvennyye prazdniki v buryatskikh ulusakh,” 51–52; idem, “K voprosu o formirovani novykh obshchestvennykh prazdnikov v buryatskikh kolkhoznykh ulusakh,” in *Etnograficheskiy sbornik*, vol. 5 (Ulan-Ude: 1969), 19–22; Vyatkina, *Ocherki kul'tury i byta buryat*, 200–201; Dashiyeva, “Traditsionnyye obshchestvennyye prazdniki buryat,” 12.

<sup>951</sup> *Ocherki istorii kul'tury Buryatii*, vol. 2, 287; Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 380–82; Vatanabe, *Obryady i politicheskaya integratsiya u buryat*, 54.

<sup>952</sup> Manturov, Fomin and Strel'nikov, “Sportivnaya letopis' Respubliki Buryatiya,” 5.

<sup>953</sup> Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barilda*, 61. See also above p. 147.



Surkharbans of the Ust'-Orda Buryat (Autonomous) Region and the Aga Buryat (Autonomous) Region, respectively.

Thus, the shifts in the Soviet nationalities policies described in Chapter 2 also reflected one-to-one in the development of Buryat traditional sports and in particular in their sports holidays, and—as in other spheres of life—not to their benefit. As Henning Eichberg has stated,

the Soviet system was based on a general disrespect for popular games and folk sports.

These were regarded as being:

- in conflict with social and economic modernization generally;
- linked with religious cults or celebrations;
- bound to ethnic nationalism or separatism;
- pre-industrial and archaic-ritualistic, bound to their origin and pattern of life; and
- far from the result-related functions of modern sport,<sup>954</sup>

but, as Eichberg further states,

[t]here seem to have been only two exceptions where traditional games and sports were tolerated or promoted, and these were:

1. When they could be accepted as a preparation for international top-level sport.  
[...]
2. When traditional games [...] were [...] transformed into organized sport disciplines, included in the state-wide classification list, and streamlined with unified rules, federations and championships of their own.<sup>955</sup>

As described above, this exactly pertained to all three Buryat sports. They were “transformed” and “streamlined,” in order to make them preparatory exercises for international sports, and they were delinked from religious cults and unbound from their origin as an openly declared measure against “ethnic nationalism or separatism.”

However, beginning in the 1960s and increasingly in the last two decades of the Soviet rule, voices were raised in Buryatia, which expressed unhappiness with the decline of the traditional

---

<sup>954</sup> Eichberg, “A Revolution of Body Culture?,” 134. See also Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 136–37.

<sup>955</sup> Eichberg, “A Revolution of Body Culture?,” 134.

features of the Buryat sports and with the secondariness with which the authorities treated them. Equally was increased criticism of the dead boring, “dull,” or simply bad ways the Surkharbans were organized. Nobody wanted to listen to the endlessly long speeches, full of inept self-praise anymore, as the flaws of the ‘Soviet system’ became even obvious at these occasions intended to celebrate its glory.<sup>956</sup> There were instances when festivals’ organizers even failed to prepare a proper volleyball field<sup>957</sup> and the shortage of bows I have already mentioned above. In conclusion, both the three traditional Buryat sports and the Surkharbans were in a state of stagnation, if not decline, during the last decades of the Soviet period.<sup>958</sup>

### **The ‘three games of men’ today (post-Soviet period)**

In the early 1990s, due to truly dire economic conditions—first the increasingly inoperative Soviet planned economy and then the even more disastrous collapse of that system without any coordinated replacement—sporting activities in general declined significantly in Buryatia and the Buryat Autonomous Regions.<sup>959</sup> Traditional sports were no exception. For instance, as mentioned above, Buryat traditional wrestling suffered further in those crisis years, as many wrestling sections of both schools and municipalities where it previously had been practiced were closed, because the necessary facilities could not be maintained (for instance, heated in the winter) and teachers and trainers did not receive their salaries. Thus, understandably, many of them left their posts. For the same reasons also many events, i.e. competitions, could not be organized.<sup>960</sup> As a consequence, throughout the 1990s and even in the first years of the new

---

<sup>956</sup> Mikhaylov, “Ob obykhakh i traditsiyakh buryat v sovremennyy period,” 11; Randalov, “Obshchestvennyye prazdniki v buryatskikh ulusakh,” 53; Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 376.

<sup>957</sup> See e.g. L. Parpayeva, “Surkharban—prazdnik molodosti i truda,” *Znamya truda*, July 7, 1977: p. 3; and O. Lebedev, “Surkharban-88,” in *Molodëzh’ Buryatii*, July 9, 1988: p. 8.

<sup>958</sup> See e.g. Valeriy Sydeyev, “Vnov’ o bukhe-barildaan,” *Pravda Buryatii*, April 5, 1989.

<sup>959</sup> A. S. Sagaleyev, K. V. Baldayev, D. V. Tsybikov and B. V. Dagbayev. “Buryatskaya shkola vol’noy bor’by: dostizheniya i problem,” in *Fizicheskaya kul’tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost’, perspektivy: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, ed. Semën V. Manturov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’sтво Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998), 39.

<sup>960</sup> Tsyrenzhapov, “Natsional’nyu bor’bu spisyvat’ so schetov rano,” *Buryatiya*, June 25, 1993: p. 4; *Respublika Buryatiya—75 let: statisticheskiy sbornik (yubileynyy vypusk)*, ed. L. A. Munayev (Ulan-Ude: Gosudarstvennyi komitet po statistike Respubliki Buryatiya, 1998), 144; A. S. Sagaleyev, K. V. Baldayev, D. V. Tsybikov and B. V. Dagbayev, “Buryatskaya shkola vol’noi bor’by: dostizheniya i problem,” in *Fizicheskaya kul’tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost’, perspektivy (materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii)*, ed. V.

millennium, several of the best sportsmen and sportswomen left Buryatia. The most famous example is Buryat wrestler Anatoliy Mikhakhanov, who, left for Japan to become—as Orora Satosi—a successful sumo wrestler there.<sup>961</sup>

However, already at that time, precisely in the first half of 1991—i.e. before the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union—authorities in Buryatia began to perform the already mentioned about-face of ‘giving back’ to the people their age-old rituals, customs, and traditions, which also included their traditional sports.<sup>962</sup> Such efforts have continued ever since, and the Republic’s governmental Agency of Physical Culture and Sport has played a major role in them.<sup>963</sup> After decades of a slow but steady process of merging the diverse national cultures into a single ‘Soviet’ one, there clearly was and still is a widespread desire among all population groups of Buryatia as in Russia in general for a revitalization of all kinds of national customs and traditions, and the Republic’s government tries—at least to a degree—to serve them in this regard. Already in the early-1990s was begun to teach and practice traditional Buryat sports as well as play traditional Buryat movement games in the schools and kindergartens,<sup>964</sup> and this practice has been continued ever since.

Even earlier, in the Perestroika years in the late-1980s, an “outburst” of *obo* and *taylagan* rituals started, and the authorities no longer tried to thwart or impede them.<sup>965</sup> This development continued ever since and reached its climax in the revitalization of the *Yordinskiye igry*, the “Games of the *Yord*,” a round, dome-shaped mountain, located close to the western shore of Lake Baikal in one of the cis-Baikal regions with predominant Buryat population, which were cut off from the Republic and even deprived of any autonomy in 1937. In 2000, after an intermittence of almost a century, the traditional all-Buryat *taylagan* at this ‘world axis,’ as this truly remarkable mountain is considered by shamanistic Buryats, was resumed and accompanied

---

Manturov and Vladimir A. Fomin (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998), 39. See also Krist, “Where Going Back is a Step Forward,” 105.

<sup>961</sup> Mikhail Shatunov, “Gud bay, Buryatiya,” *Nomer odin*, July 27, 2005: p. 8.

<sup>962</sup> Vladimir A. Fomin, “Po nepisannym zakonam predkov,” *Buryatiya*, May 11, 1991: p. 4. See above, p. 168.

<sup>963</sup> See, e.g. Vladislav M. Bumboshkin, Vladislav M., Dmitriy G. Petrenko and K. N. Saganov, “Razvitiye massovoy fizicheskoy kul'tury i sporta posredstvom ispol'zovaniya natsional'nykh fizicheskikh uprazhneniy, igr i vidov sporta,” in *Sovremennyy olimpiyskiy i massovyy sport v kontekste 'vostok-zapad': Materialy III Mezhdunarodnoy nauchnoprakticheskoy konferentsii, g. Ulan-Ude, 7–10 sentyabrya 2005 g.*, ed. Aleksey V. Gas'kov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2005).

<sup>964</sup> Randalov, Dobolova, Malanov and Dondubon, *Maloye selo Buryatii*, 52.

<sup>965</sup> Humphrey, “Population Trends, Ethnicity and Religion among the Buryats,” 168. See also Musch, *Nomadismus und Sesshaftigkeit bei den Burjaten*, 19.

by competitions in the traditional sports.<sup>966</sup> In 2005 and 2011 this was repeated at even greater scales. Each time thousands of people gathered to worship together and to watch (or participate in) the games. Already earlier, from 1990 onwards, the Surkharban festivals were symbolically relinked with their cultic origin. The Republic Surkharban of that year was officially named *Yekhe taylgan-Surkharban*, i.e. “Great Taylagan-Surkharban”.<sup>967</sup>

Thus, in addition to the re-traditionalization of the ~~n~~atraditional Buryat sport styles, as described in the Chapters 3, 4, and 5, also the general settings and configurations of the ~~n~~atraditional sport festivals were significantly reshaped in a traditionalistic fashion from the early 1990s onwards. One cannot, however, call these new designs of the festivals re-traditionalizations, because in these particular, actually new forms they had never been celebrated before. What in the main was done at most of the festivals was simply a replacement of all (or almost all) Soviet and communist symbols, paraphernalia, and epithets with those of a new state cult. For instance, flags were still one of the main symbols at the Surkharban festivals, just not the red ones anymore. During the opening ceremonies, the official azure-white-yellow state flag of the Republic of Buryatia was hoisted on a staff next to another on which the white-blue-red banner of the Russian Federation already waved in the wind. These colors also dominated the decorations of the stadiums and of the masses of balloons, which were usually released at the events.

There was, however, also an attempt to link the games to a Buryat heroic figure, who was, as described above, rather disliked by the Soviet rulers: the epic hero Geser. He—that is, the story of him—nonetheless remained popular in Buryatia, mainly, however, among the mostly shamanistic cis-Baikal Buryats. From the mid-1990s until fairly recently, Geser—impersonated by an actor (usually a Buryat sports star)—nonetheless led the opening parades at the annual Republic Surkharbans in Ulan-Ude. This new custom was an outcome of the so-called “Geseriad”, a series of annual folkloristic festivals called *Geserey naadam* (“Geser Games”), which were held by order of the government of the Republic of Buryatia in the first half of the 1990s and especially welcomed, supported, and was in fact organized by Buryat intellectuals and artists. With this undertaking they aimed at making the epic hero a national identification figure of all Buryats and an emblem of the Republic of Buryatia similar to how Genghis Khan was

---

<sup>966</sup> Dorzhi Sodnompilov, “Yordynskiye igry na Ol’khone,” *Inform Polis*, July 9, 2000; Babuyeva, *Material’naya i dukhovnaya kul’tura buryat*, 176–80.

<sup>967</sup> Valeriy Sydeyev, “Pod devyat’yu znamenami predkov,” *Pravda Buryatii*, July 11, 1990: p. 4.

made the national hero and icon in neighboring Mongolia at the same time.<sup>968</sup> Another new custom, which was introduced at the Yekhe taylgan-Surkharban of 1990 and upheld until fairly recently, also seems to have been inspired by a very similar practice in Mongolia: like the nine so-called *Süld*—i. e. Standards—of Genghis Khan at the annual State Naadam of Mongolia nine “holy Buryat standards” made of black and white hair from horse tails were put up on the stage called “Geser’s Throne”, which was erected in front of the main stand of the hippodrome of Ulan-Ude,<sup>969</sup> where the festivals were held until fairly recently.

Thus, the Buryat sports holidays were characterized by a mixture of traditionalisms and state cult(s) from the beginning of the post-Soviet period. In the two and a half decades since then, this mixture has been even further variegated. First, the Republic Surkharbans adopted the typical characteristics which mega (sports) events worldwide bear today: advertising, merchandising, media coverage, entertainments, star and personality cults, etc. As a result, these festivals, despite their traditional(istic) features, appear today in an absolute modern fashion too. The various spectacles which were and still are added to the festivals’ programs—airplanes flying over the race track, skydivers landing on it, car corsos, etc.—further contributed to this and turned the events into entertainment shows.

Second, the mixture of traditional and ‘modern’ sports, which became a widespread and in fact typical practice at the Surkharbans in Soviet times, was upheld and, at places, even expanded. There are reports of district Surkharbans at which competitions in post climbing, Yakutian mas-wrestling, grenade throwing, and, in one case, even a contest of beer lovers (sic!) were added to the festival’s program,<sup>970</sup> and I have witnessed competitions in Yakutian jumps and in the Russian bat throwing game *gorodki* as part of Surkharbans’ programs. In several cases it even took some time until the three *traditional* sports were again *included* into the programs of the holidays, as they had disappeared at some Surkharbans altogether during the late-Soviet

---

<sup>968</sup> Roberte N. Hamayon, “Emblem of Minority, Substitute for Sovereignty: The Case of Buryatia,” *Diogenes* 194, 49/2 (2002): 16–17, 19; idem, “Construction of a National Emblem, Recomposition of Identities and ‘Heroic’ Millenarianism in post-Soviet Buryatia: A Reappraisal,” in *Circumpolar Ethnicity and Identity* (ed. T. Irimoto and T. Yamada), *Senri Ethnological Studies* 66 (2004): 293–96; Tatiana Skrynnikova and Darima Amogolonova, “Stories and Symbols of the Post-Soviet Buryat National Revival,” chapter 2 in *Dilemmas of Diversity after the Cold War: Analyses of “Cultural Difference” by U.S. and Russia-Based Scholars*, ed. Michele Rivkin-Fish and Elena Trubina (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2010), 90–91.

<sup>969</sup> Valeriy Sydeyev, “Pod devyat’yu znamenami predkov,” *Pravda Buryatii*, July 11, 1990: p. 4.

<sup>970</sup> Sergey Rinchinov, “Adres schast’ya—Baykal’skiy bereg,” *Buryatiya*, July 9, 1997: p. 6; Valeriy Sydeyev, “‘Bogatyrskaya nasha sila...’,” *Buryatiya*, July 16, 2003: p.24.

period. For instance, at the District Surkharban of Sakamensk they were reintroduced only in 1993, and in Tunka a horse race was again organized only in 1996.<sup>971</sup>

Third, and seemingly antagonistically, the festivals have been linked again with Buddhist religious rituals. This is in fact the most striking post-Soviet development. In 1996 *eryn gurban naadan*, i.e. ‘three games of men,’ were part of the celebrations of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the datsan of Ivolginsk;<sup>972</sup> in 1997 such games were organized in honor of a visiting high Mongolian lama at the datsans of Ivolginsk and Kizhinga; in 2010 the games were part of the celebrations of the fifteenth anniversary of Khambo Lama Ayusheyev’s “enthronement,”<sup>973</sup> since 2003 they are again an integral part of the *Maydar Khural*—the main Buddhist ceremony of the summer—at the datsan of Ivolginsk as well as at other datsans as it was customary until the religious purges in the 1930s; since 2008 a prestigious *Eryn gurban naadan* is annually organized at the datsan of *Egituy* in eastern Buryatia, where the *Zandan Zhuu*, a famous sandal wood Buddha statue, is kept; and many more Buddhist sacred ceremonies are accompanied by the games all over Buryatia and the Buryat Regions since about the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, and many of them are held annually. Thus, the Buddhist clergy has created an actual annual *season* of games, i.e. a series of Eryn gurban naadans, starting in April and ending in September with the aforementioned Itigelovian Games as the season’s climax.<sup>974</sup> All these events are organized in a very traditionalistic manner: archers have to wear traditional Buryat garb, use (real or fake) traditional Buryat bows and shoot at twelve sury and one lasti;<sup>975</sup> horse races are run over long distances; and wrestlers have to wear the traditional waist belts, obey the reestablished traditional(istic) rules and have to dance the eagle dance.

In addition to this great number of traditionalistic Eryn gurban naadans the Buddhist clergy organized, they also usually awarded higher prizes for the winners than those awarded at the state organized Surkharbans. The lamas usually presented the winners with a live ram or a race horse or with significant amounts of money, and sometimes even with a car or an expensive

---

<sup>971</sup> Badma Sh. Dorzhiyev, *Istoriya Zakamny: populyarnyy istoricheskiy ocherk*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs SO RAN, 1997), 152; Valeriy Sydeyev, “Tunkinskiy surkharban,” *Buryatiya Sport*, July 1996: p. 4.

<sup>972</sup> Valeriy Sydeyev, “Turniru byt' traditsionnym,” *Buryatiya*, September 9, 1996: p. 7.

<sup>973</sup> Aleksandr Makhachkeyev, “Glavnomu buddistu strany darili kartiny i loshadey,” *Inform Polis*, July 23, 2010: p. 1.

<sup>974</sup> Tsyren-Dorzhi N. Magakov, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, July 2011.

<sup>975</sup> Fomin, “Narodnyye vidy sporta buryat,” 385.

travel.<sup>976</sup> They did this, whenever they could, because they wanted to promote their traditionalistic rules, and wanted to firmly (*re*)link the three traditional Buryat sports with their religion. Today one can say that the Buddhist clergy—under the leadership of Khambo Lama Ayusheyev—succeeded in this effort. They indeed have won this “struggle for symbolic dominance,” which took “place between the leading social, political and economic institutions of the changing Buriat society, [...] the Buddhist religion, the State [...] and players in the new market economy,” as I characterized this development in an article published in 2004 at the height of this “struggle.”<sup>977</sup> They succeeded, because they organized significantly more competitions in these particular three sports than the state authorities and awarded, as stated, higher prizes for the winners, which they could, because they not only used their own financial resources for this, but also got at least as much support by the “players in the new market economy,” i.e. local businessmen, than the state authorities got for their Surkharbans. Most importantly, however, this success was due to the Buryat sportsmen and sportswomen themselves, as they generally agreed with the rule changes, as well as with the connection of the competitions with Buddhist rituals.

Thus, the Buddhist clergy’s attempt to relink the traditional sports with their religious rituals was successful. To the contrary, the state authorities’ and leading intellectuals’ attempt to relink them with the epic hero Geser was not. Already in papers published in 2002 and 2004, Hamayon rightly stated that “[t]he erection of Geser as a national emblem remained confined to the political and intellectual authorities of the Republic”<sup>978</sup> and “failed to catch the imagination of ordinary Buryats.”<sup>979</sup> At the end of that decade, the hero silently disappeared from the opening ceremony of the Republic Surkharban.

An attempt to establish a ‘Buryat triathlon’, i.e. a competition in which the athletes have to compete in *all three* sports, which was mostly promoted by the leading sport historian of Buryatia, the Russian scholar Vladimir Aleksandrovich Fomin, around the turn of the millennium, equally failed. Although having skills in all three of these activities was surely common among the Buryats in former times, this tradition could not be revived. Only twice were

---

<sup>976</sup> See e.g. Oleg Mikhaylov, “Sostyazaniya pod vsevidyashchim okom bozhestv,” *Inform Polis*, July 28, 2004: p.15, and Anatoliy Tsaganov, “Kto on, Leonid Zambalayev? Sportivnyy unikum ili champion iz Verkhnego Burgaltaya,” *Sport Tamir*, August 3, 2011: p. 3.

<sup>977</sup> Krist, “Where Going Back is a Step Forward,” 111.

<sup>978</sup> Hamayon, “Construction of a National Emblem,” 300.

<sup>979</sup> Hamayon, “Emblem of Minority,” 18.

small competitions in such a triathlon able to be organized in a village in Southern Buryatia, but never happened again there, or anywhere else.<sup>980</sup> The same holds true for the tradition of night archery under the light of bonfires. To my knowledge only once—in 2006 at an event called “Baikalian Games of Indigenous Peoples” organized in the Tunka District of the Republic of Buryatia—was such a competition held.<sup>981</sup>

To maintain or reestablish the attractiveness of the Surkharbans the state authorities had to follow the changes the Buddhist clergy had introduced. With short delays also at the Surkharbans the archers shot at twelve sury and one lasti, the wrestlers competed in the three “Itigelovian” weight classes, wrestled with waist belts, and danced the eagle dance, and horse races were run over longer distances. Since about 2010 all this has been done at all Surkharbans, and even the prizes for the winners went up at them as well. For example, at the Republic Surkharban of 2010 the winning wrestler was awarded 6,500 US dollars.<sup>982</sup>

By following the specific ‘retraditionalizations’ of the three traditional Buryat sports which the Buddhist clergy had introduced and—as a second measure—by step-by-step eliminating the various non-traditional sports and other competitions, the state authorities could maintain and recently even increase the popularity of their festivals, i.e. of the Surkharbans. At the Republic Surkharban of 2015 the only remaining non-traditional, or non-Buryat, competition was that in dumb bell lifting, and this might have been its last time, because it already “looked alien in the program of the festival,” as one journalist has aptly put it.<sup>983</sup> At this Surkharban in addition to Buryat wrestling, archery, and horse racing, several competitions in other traditional Buryat games and activities were organized: *shatar*—Buryat chess,<sup>984</sup> *shagay naadan*—traditional Buryat-Mongolian games of skill with ankle bones of sheep,<sup>985</sup> *yokhor khatarkha*—traditional

---

<sup>980</sup> Valeriy Sydeyev, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, July 2003; Vladimir A. Fomin, personal communication, Ulan-Ude, July 2005.

<sup>981</sup> Sayana Mansheyeva and Ayuna Gabaguyeva, “Pervyye mezhdunarodnyye baykal’skiye igry korennykh narodov ‘Korin 2006’—Dnevnik igr,” *Agentstvo sporta*, March 2006: p. 15.

<sup>982</sup> Boris Baldanov and Valeriy Sydeyev, “‘Surkharban’—prazdnik nashego naroda,” *Sport Tamir*, July 21, 2010: p. 3.

<sup>983</sup> Lev Khandazhapov, “Stepnoy prazdnik v tsentre Ulan-Ude,” *Nomer odin*, July 8, 2015: p. 31, translation mine.

<sup>984</sup> For the rules, particularities, and history of this game see e.g. Yevgeniy V. Baynov and Mariya Ye. Baynova, *Shatar—buryatskiye shakhmaty* (Ulan-Ude: Detsko-yunosheskaya sportivnaya shkola No. 8, 2015).

<sup>985</sup> For detailed descriptions of several of these games see e.g. Grigoriy N. Potanin, *Ocherki severo-zapadnoy Mongolii. Rezul’taty puteshestviya, ispolnennogo 1876–1877 godakh*. volume 2 (Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografiya V.



Buryat round dances, and *heer shaalgan*—the breaking of sheep back bones by hitting them with one's fist, which is one of the “nine sciences” a Buryat man should master<sup>986</sup> and a true spectacle to watch indeed. Thus, this most recent Surkharban was truly a *Buryat* event, which was much appreciated by both the athletes and the spectators, including the many Russians which could especially be seen among the latter.

Another fairly recent development in regard to Surkharbans is worthy of mention as well. Since around the turn of the millennium, it became a widespread custom that the numerous formal and informal associations of people, who originate from a particular district of the Republic or from the Aga or Ust'-Orda Buryat Regions or from other areas with a significant Buryat population, organize their own, sometimes small, but sometimes even large Surkharbans in Ulan-Ude. Examples are the Surkharbans of the *zemlyachestvo*—i.e. “territorial association”—in Ulan-Ude of the *Tunkintsy*, the migrants from the Tunka District of the Republic, that of the association of the *Okintsy*, migrants from the Oka District of the Republic, that of the *Ol'khontsy*, migrants from the Ol'khon District of the Irkutsk Province, and others.<sup>987</sup> Similarly also a number of Buryat diaspora groups in towns far away from Buryatia organize annual Surkharbans. Examples for this are the Surkharbans in Yakutsk, Moscow,<sup>988</sup> Saint Petersburg, and Madrid,<sup>989</sup> the capital of Spain, which has one of the largest Buryat migrant communities outside of Russia. For all of them organizing these events and coming together at them is a means of upholding Buryat traditions and reaffirming their Buryat identity.

Today in Ulan-Ude, in turn, also groups who are not specifically Buryat, for instance students of a particular university or inhabitants of a particular *kvartal*—a neighborhood—or workers of a particular company or administration department, organize Surkharbans to reaffirm their group identity. Thus today small-scale Surkharbans are also self-organized by various

---

Kirshbauma, 1881), 117–19; or Erika Taube, “Einige mongolische Unterhaltungsspiele,” in *Jahrbuch des Museums für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig*, vol. 24 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1967), 56–65.

<sup>986</sup> See footnote 685.

<sup>987</sup> See e.g. Valeriy Sydeyev, “Zemlyaki s'yekhalis' na Surkharban,” *Buryatiya*, June 19, 1997: p. 7; idem, “Ni shagu na meste! Ni shagu nazad! Tol'ko vmeste! Tol'ko vperediii!,” *Sport Tamir*, December 30, 2000: p. 6; and idem, “Prazdnik molodosti, sily i krasoty,” *Buryaad unen*, July 5, 2001: p. 20.

<sup>988</sup> Monika G. Banayeva, “Buryaty Moskvyy: migratsii i opyt sotsiokul'turnoy adaptatsii,” *Etnograficheskoye obozreniye* 6 (2011): 51.

<sup>989</sup> See e.g. “Buryatskiy Surkharban v Madride,” <http://www.espanarusa.com/ru/news/article/95734> (accessed September 4, 2015).

smaller groups of people. They often get some support from either the state or the Buddhist clergy or from both, however.<sup>990</sup>

As regards state organized events, the biennial all-Buryat *Altargana* folk festivals need to be mentioned, as they also have contributed to the boom of the traditional Buryat sports in recent years. Since 2004 it was held twice in the Aga Region, once in the Irkutsk Province, twice in Ulan-Ude, and will be held there again in 2016.

Despite these developments, the most important, largest, most prestigious, and best attended sports events in Buryatia—especially in the *rural* regions—are still the Eryn gurban naadans organized by the Buddhist clergy. The declared aim of their strong support of the Buryat traditional sports is to “serve the recovery of the Buryat people and to uplift their intellect as well as spirituality.”<sup>991</sup> This is part of their adamant promotion of a return to what they consider traditional Buryat values and what should lead to a more sustainable way of life in better harmony with nature. To support the rural Buryat population is therefore a primary goal. As the traditional Buryat sports are particularly popular among the rural Buryat youth, they without doubt are a perfect vehicle for achieving this<sup>992</sup> and have, in turn, indeed benefitted enormously from this support in the last years.

What, however, also comes along with this venture of the Buddhist clergymen—which doubtlessly merits credit—is their rather conservative world views, for instance their belief that girls’ and women’s destiny is primarily to keep the household. Nonetheless, and even in contradiction to the opinion their leader Khambo Lama Ayusheyev has on this, female archers, as mentioned earlier, frequently compete with the men at the festival of the “Three Games of Men”. And at events not organized by the Buddhist clergy, I have seen girls participating in, and even winning, tournaments in Buryat ~~na~~traditional wrestling and being cheered on by the crowd. This is one example that ongoing social processes—including antagonisms—are well reflected in Buryat sports.

Another example of this is one attempt of the Buddhist clergy in which they, at least so far, have mainly failed. By grouping the teams of participating athletes not by the administrative

---

<sup>990</sup> Cf. Krist, “Where Going back is a Step Forward,” 112; and Valeriy Sydeyev, “Kvartal’nyy Surkharban,” *Sport Tamir*, June 31, 2004: p. 4.

<sup>991</sup> Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barilda*, 152.

<sup>992</sup> Cf. the preface of Lama Bair Tsybikov—who is the present head judge of the ‘Eryn Gurban Naadan’-games organized under the aegis of the Buryat Buddhist clergy—in Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barilda*, 14–15.

districts, in which they reside—as since the early Soviet period is done at the state organized sports events—but by the *datsans*, i.e. the Buddhist monasteries, the number of which has grown in Buryatia to over thirty in the post-Soviet period, they try to create ‘*datsan identities*,’ that is feelings of belonging to one particular monastery. Yet, so far this has not been very successful. People—including the sportsmen and sportswomen—have still clearly stronger feelings of belonging to their *districts*, which were established, as mentioned, by the Soviet authorities, but retained also after the end of Soviet rule, than any feeling of belonging to a particular *datsan*.

Two more, rather antagonistic features are found at both the state organized *Surkharbans* and the Buddhist clergy’s *Eryn gurban naadans* today. On the one hand a constant pursuit of the events’ organizers to include into the festivities’ programs funny and entertaining activities can be observed. Those include performances of professional and amateur musicians, singers, and dancers of all styles as well as rather funny sportive activities or competitions like tug-of-war, rodeo, or the aforementioned ‘bone games’ *shagay* and *heer shaalgan*. As elderly informants have told me, this was typical for the *naadan*-games in pre-World War Two times, at least in rural areas.<sup>993</sup> Feasting, that is, coming together and having fun, was the primary purpose of the events, and *celebrating* the victories or good results of wrestlers, archers, or race horses was more important than their actual performance during the competitions. To a certain degree this ‘culture of laughter’ has been resumed at the traditional(istic) sport events of Buryatia today.

What can be observed at the same time, however, is an eager striving, especially on the part of the officials, for not only to standardize and regulate the sports, but to *sportify* in this way also the *zabavy*, that is, *playful* activities, which the dances and the games with the bones used to be. For instance, the *yokhor* dance groups often compete against each other, as a jury grades their performances and declares one of them the winner, and for *heer shaalgan*—the bone breaking game—artificial bones made of synthetic material were recently introduced, in order to make it a standardized, ‘serious,’ international sport. Thus, this only just revived traditional Buryat game might lose its specific Buryat character right away.

To sum up, today Buryat sports holidays are vivid, well attended, numerous events, however characterized by a number of antagonistic features. They can be modern sports events, parts of religious rituals, feasts of small or large groups, and sometimes all of this at once. They can be

---

<sup>993</sup> Rigzhidma Ganchikzhapova, personal communication, Sugalay (Aga Buryat Region), June 1996; Agrafena D. Ignayeva, personal communication, Atsagat (Buryatia), August 8, 2010.

mere feasts for people to have fun or they can be serious, competitive sports events—or both. This multifariousness seems in fact to be for the holidays' benefit, as they in these diverse forms flourish in Buryatia today.



## Discussion, Results, and Conclusions:

### Buryat Sports as a Mirror of Society and a Means for Social Change

#### Brief chapter summaries

To begin the discussion of the presented historical and ethnographic data, a brief recapitulation of what has been outlined and described in the previous chapters will be useful.

In Chapter 1, “The Anthropology of Sports: A Historical Overview”, has been described from the numerous perspectives of the presented approaches and theories that sports and society are—and have always been—deeply and inseparably entangled. This they are, in short, because “[t]he athlete is not alone in the world and moves always in social relations,” as Henning Eichberg has boiled down this basic insight (2006).<sup>994</sup> The values, normative demands, and rules operating in a society at large are always reflected in its sports. Furthermore, it has been shown that sports have the potential to trigger social change, because they are a *free*, that is, *in principle* a voluntary, and in any case, even when it comes to professional sports, at least to a certain degree a *playful* activity. Thus they are “outlets for creativity,”<sup>995</sup> and because the athletes are “not alone in the world,” their creations may change the world. Thus, sports are both an indicator and a barometer of social change. Power relations, gender relations, ethnic relations, world views and values, economic conditions, technical standards, all this and more are reflected in sports and can also be challenged or changed in and by them.

In the presented historical overview of the development of the academic discipline of the anthropology of sports, in addition to these two basic insights—(1) sports mirror social changes and (2) sports can produce them—stress has been laid on several particular aspects of how and why this happens and on approaches and concepts to explain them. One of them was the application of Gramsci’s hegemony theory on sports, viewing and describing them as an important arena in which the struggle for cultural hegemony is fought out between the main social, political, and economic groups and powers in a society, as most of them usually try to

---

<sup>994</sup> Eichberg, “The Nation in Movement,” 12.

<sup>995</sup> Stumpf-Frederickson, “Sports and the Cultures of Man,” 87–88. See above, p. 62.

utilize sports—especially popular spectator sports of course—for their purposes. Thus protagonists often seek to functionalize sports. This can be one way in which sports may gain their often observed identity constructing (or at least marking or reinforcing) function. However, this function can also be created by the acting sportspeople themselves; in any case, “politics of identity [...] often figure prominently in sport,” as Noel Dyck concisely stated.<sup>996</sup>

Of the various other functions sports may fulfill and which have been described in the chapter, particular attention has been given to sports’ ‘magic function,’ which they have held for the majority of people in historic times and for many still hold today. The belief in such a function of sports may derive from the common origins of sports and ritual. On the principle of sympathetic magic, sports competitions are, like rituals, believed to influence ‘divine struggles’ between good and evil (supernatural) forces, and are thus believed to be a necessary activity for ensuring wellbeing and preventing calamities of nature. Therefore to participate in them is often considered a duty and cult leaders and clergymen strongly encourage people to do so.

A more mundane function of sports is that they are a powerful means for socialization and enculturation. As Donald Calhoun has succinctly remarked, in sports “children model and adults reinforce in symbolic, and therefore safe, form the activities and attitudes important in their culture.”<sup>997</sup>

I have also stressed that sports are, in many regards, a *symbolic* activity. Sports competitions often symbolize a struggle between imagined, supernatural forces or between biological or psychological ‘principles,’ such as, for instance, the male and the female. Particular activities and pieces of equipment stand for other entities, like, for instance, the race for the course of the sun, the ball for a god or Jesus Christ, or the fighting cock for the dignity and self esteem of a Balinese man. Thus, sports competitions are often performances of cultural traits and values in a ‘symbolic language.’ Clifford Geertz’s famous statement that Balinese cock fights are “a Balinese reading of [a] Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves,”<sup>998</sup> holds true for many other games and sports competitions worldwide.

Both in the beginning of the chapter and towards its end, I focused on what became a central notion in sports anthropology—*body culture*. Its basic meaning is that humans’ ‘bodily techniques’ are *culturally* determined, as Marcel Mauss already convincingly outlined in his

---

<sup>996</sup> Dyck, Dyck, “Introduction,” 5. See above p. 60.

<sup>997</sup> Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 62. See above, p. 61.

<sup>998</sup> Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” 448. See above, p. 77.

paper “Les techniques du corps” (1935). Later, Bourdieu’s notion of ‘habitus’ substantially concurred with this finding and Norbert Elias’ analysis of the history of table manners confirmed it. Henning Eichberg introduced “[t]his perspective,” which “looks at the body primarily as cultural, which is to say, as socially constructed and historically variable”<sup>999</sup> into sports anthropology by coining the notion of “body cultures”. He stressed, like Mauss, the plurality of them, but that they differ not only between the various national cultures, but also inside them. This he concluded from, as I formulated, the “varied, fluid, versatile, or even contradictory characteristics of sports,”<sup>1000</sup> which can be found everywhere. More than others Eichberg pointed at the diverse characters sports can have. Only some of them are international, standardized, achievement orientated, professional sports; others are much more gamelike, playful, fun orientated activities, embedded in ‘cultures of laughter,’ as he formulated.

This insight also determines his analysis of how *identities* are constructed in or by means of sports. In regards to *national* identities he first revealed that they above all need to be *practiced*, in order to both emerge and become consolidated. Second, he identified three different models of how national identities are expressed in and by means of sports: (1) the *identity of production*, in which the nation is “understood as [...] competing with other nations,”<sup>1001</sup> and thus sports need to be international, result and ranking orientated, achievement sports; (2) the *identity of integration*, which is characterized by the primacy of discipline and conformity, and thus expressed by mass choreographies, marches, gymnastics, and the like; (3) the *popular identity*, which emerges from an emancipated civil society by means of self organization and thus linked mainly with popular games, feasts, carnival, and similar activities. As all three of these models, despite their contradictoriness, coexist in every society, but in differing strengths, this categorization constitutes an excellent tool for identifying the particular social meanings which sports bear in a particular society and the roles their actors play in them. For the study of Buryat sports, that is, of sports in a society, which for most of its history has been characterized by struggles between different social, political, and economic institutions and their inherent ideologies, this relatively recently developed analytical approach (Eichberg 2006), presented in chapter 1—suits particularly well.

---

<sup>999</sup> Brownell, “Thinking Dangerously,” 41. See above, p. 83.

<sup>1000</sup> See above, p. 54.

<sup>1001</sup> Eichberg, “The Nation in Movement,” 6. See above, p. 85.



In Chapter 2, “Between East and West: History of the Buryats”, I described first the main geographic and present demographic features of the area of Buryat settlement—the steppe lands around Lake Baikal in Southern Siberia. The natural conditions are mainly those of semi-arid grasslands with generally low precipitation and a rather harsh climate with long and cold winters and short but sometimes hot summers. Traditionally most of the Buryats had been nomadic stock breeders who additionally hunted and, especially in Lake Baikal, also fished. However, during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century, Russian immigration made the Buryats a minority in their homeland and also altered their way of life considerably. The massive loss of pasture land to the Russian immigrants forced them to abandon their nomadic mode of life and to become settled farmers mainly growing crops like the Russians. In addition, modern, transregional transportation networks—especially the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad at the end of the nineteenth century—led to significant industrialization and urbanization in the region in the twentieth century. Today a significant number of Buryats live urban lives in Ulan-Ude and other towns in the Russian Federation.

After this basic geographical data, I outlined the prehistory and the early and medieval history of the region, and how the Buryat nation developed. I showed that the Buryats have their main roots in Mongolian tribes, whose presence in the area can be traced back to the third century CE and who dominated the area from the tenth to the seventeenth century. However, as also Evenk groups have settled in the region not later than the Mongolian, and Turkic groups came there no later than in the sixth century CE and then even dominated the area for about half a millennium until the Mongolian domination began, both these ethno-linguistic groups have surely mixed with the Mongolian. As regards the Evenks, large groups of them have been assimilated by the Buryat-Mongols even as late as in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. However, the emergence of the *Buryat*-Mongols as distinct from the Mongols of Mongolia is for the most part due to the conquest of the Baikal region by the Russians. The separation of the Mongolian groups, who ended up in the Russian Empire, after it had established its border with the Chinese Empire in 1689, from the Mongols who fell to the Chinese Empire, and the intense Russian influence in both cultural and political terms in the following centuries, has led to the development of a distinct Buryat ethnic and finally national identity among them. This resulted in a cultural mix of ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ features by which the Buryat culture can be described since the nineteenth century. How they make their living—in rural areas predominantly by arable

farming, in the towns mainly by occupations in the tertiary sector, especially in the administration and as teachers, health care professionals, journalists, artists, academics, and suchlike — is mainly ‘western,’ i.e. ‘Russian. Their religious life (as most of them remained Buddhists or shamanists), their high valuation of kinship ties, and their upholding of various traditions and customs like their typical cuisine, celebrations, music, dance, and sports, has remained ‘Eastern,’ i.e. traditionally Mongolian.

In this chapter I described how the Russian conquest of the Buryat land in the seventeenth century and its subsequent colonization proceeded. The Buryats’ economy was affected very negatively because of the massive land loss to the Russian settlers. Most other spheres of life were however much less affected, because the Tsarist administration’s policies regarding the Buryats were, with the exception of the last two or three decades of the Tsarist period, characterized by a relatively low level of interference in internal Buryat matters, most of the time conceding them far-reaching political and economic autonomy.

As I outlined in the chapter, quite the opposite was the case during the Soviet period, because the 1923 established Buryat(-Mongolian) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was only formally autonomous. The forced collectivization of the rural population meant the final, i.e. mortal, blow to traditional Buryat stock breeding, Russification of all spheres of life together with mischievous script and school reforms brought the Buryat language to the brink of the status of an endangered language, and the government even openly attempted to extinguish Buddhism and shamanism.

With regard to the latter, post-Soviet developments showed that the Soviet authorities have failed in this matter, as the most notable change in Buryat society, since the fall of the Soviet Union, is the stormy revitalization of both Buddhism and shamanism in Buryatia, as described in the chapter. As regards the Buryat language, such a development could not be described, as this language’s decline could not be stopped. The same holds true for Buryat autonomy rights. Attempts to restore them totally failed, as both the Russian majority in the region and the central government in Moscow rejected this. The situation regarding Buryat cultural traditions is different: Buryat music and dancing remained popular throughout the turmoil of history and recently even gained new popularity, as did likewise traditional Buryat sports.

In Chapters 3, “*Bukhe barildaan*—Buryat Wrestling”, 4, “*Sur kharbaan*—Buryat Archery”, and 5, “*Mori urildaan*—Buryat Horse Races”, I described the main features and historical

developments of these three traditional Buryat sports. I laid stress on the explanation of their cultic origin as well as on their connectedness with the traditional Buryat way of life. Various examples and proofs of their old age and continuing popularity among the Buryats throughout history I presented in each chapter for each sport. These included Neolithic petroglyphs, Bronze Age bronze plates, historical reports about competitions, and examples of the sports' frequent appearance in Buryat folk literature. In each chapter I also showed that practicing these sports, and the skills one acquired by doing so, were of great importance for vital activities of the Buryats, in particular for hunting and warfare. Also I described the equipments used in these sports; in particular detail the bows, arrows, and targets for archery. Besides their material properties and construction characteristics, I laid stress on their symbolic meanings, which reveal these sports' origins in shamanistic protective and fertility magic and their connectedness with hunting and warfare. Furthermore I showed that this also holds true for the rules of the competitions and their ritualistic elements. For example the 'rule of the three dots' in wrestling derives from the mounted form of warfare, which the Buryats exclusively carried out in former times, as do the long distances of the horse races; and the wrestlers' eagle dance and the bara, the praise song sung to the archers, are of clear magic origin.

Further in each of these chapters I described how all of this, i.e. the equipment, the rules, the rituals, and the general settings of the competitions, that is how, where, when, and by whom they were carried out, have changed in the course of history and why. I showed that they have been influenced not only by general processes of modernization, such as, for instance, the invention of fire arms and motorized means of transportation, but also by political and ideological changes. The described rule changes for wrestling and archery and the shortening of the distances of the horse races during the Soviet period, and the reversals of these changes in the post-Soviet period, are examples of this. The Soviet authorities aimed at a modernization and internationalization of these sports. In the post-Soviet period mostly the Buddhist clergy aimed at a re-traditionalization or 're-Buryatization' of them. Both of them could reach their goals to a great extent in the respective time periods, but not totally, however. As I noted, the three sports could not be modernized totally in the Soviet period, but became hybrids of traditional and newly introduced elements, regarding both rules and equipment. Archers, for instance shot with modern plastic bows at the traditional targets according to rules, which were a mixture of traditional Buryat and international rules. In the post-Soviet period, the Buddhist clergy, as well as the state authorities,

could not, or did not want to, annul all alterations introduced in Soviet times. For instance, the reintroduction of traditional Buryat bows failed and as regards the current rules of the archery competitions, they still constitute a compromise between traditional and international rules, in order to prevail on the majority of Buryat archers to participate in the competitions. Women also compete, although leading Buddhist clergymen are against their participation.

In Chapter 6, “The Buryat Traditional Sports Holidays”, I described how these holidays, at which the three described sports competitions are carried out, have developed, and how they changed over time. I showed that the ways the holidays were organized, and by whom, and on which occasions was also always influenced by the changing political and ideological leaderships. I described that the holidays were originally carried out as part of shamanistic sacrificial rituals, then by the Buddhist clergy incorporated into their sacramental ceremonial practice and at the same time also utilized by the Tsarist authorities, then functionalized by the Soviet authorities, and now again utilized by the Buddhist clergy, but still by the state authorities as well. I showed that these holidays always had manifold functions in and for the Buryat society, among them magic-religious, military, social, political, and identity constructing and reinforcing ones. In the course of history the holidays reinforced various group identities and prevailing beliefs among them or, more precisely, they were frequently utilized for this purpose.

Originally these were clan identities and shamanistic beliefs, as the competitions were organized at get-togethers of clan members for carrying out sacrificial rituals in honor of the clan’s protector and ancestor spirits. Later, the Buddhist clergy aimed at strengthening people’s beliefs in Buddhist deities by organizing the games as part of some of their sacramental ceremonies and the Tsarist authorities utilized them for reinforcing the Buryats’ loyalty to the tsars. The Soviet state and party authorities utilized the holidays for propagating and glorifying the new socio-economic system they had created and for reinforcing the new kolkhoz, district, republic, and Soviet identities they wished people should now have. However, neither of them, that is, neither the Buddhist clergy nor the Tsarist administration and also not the Soviet authorities completely succeeded in their efforts, as none of them could become the sole organizer of these holidays. In the post-Soviet period, this did not change. Although, as described in the chapter, the Buddhist clergy became the leading organizer of the holidays, such are also still organized by the state authorities, are held again at shamanist *taylagan* rituals of clans, and today, are also organized by various smaller or larger groups, who, too, use the organization of

Surkharban or Eryn gurban naadan festivals for strengthening their group identity. All of these festivals are, however, characterized by a more or less strong endeavor to obey to forms, which are considered traditional.

Most recently, particularly at the state organized holidays a slight decrease of formal elements, like fewer and shorter speeches and less pathetic opening ceremonies, and instead a slight increase of feasting elements, like dancing, singing, and the playing of traditional Buryat games with sheep bones, can be observed. However, officials strive to make also these games standardized competitions.

## **Results and analyses**

As stated in the introduction, the questions asked in this research can—in one way—be organized into three main categories:

- (1) questions regarding the *origin* and *history* of the three sports and the holidays;
- (2) questions regarding these sports' and holidays' capacity of being a *mirror of society*;
- (3) questions regarding the *social functions* of these sports and holidays.

As also stated, many questions asked in this research are related to more than one of these groups and often interrelated. In what follows, I will present first what answers I found to the questions that *primarily* address issues surrounding the first category and then I will present the answers to the questions relating primarily to categories two and three.

### ***About the origins and history of the 'three games of men'***

The study of the sources available show that in the decades-old debate about whether these competitions are rooted in shamanistic sacrificial rituals (cultic or religious origin) or in collective hunting (socio-economic origin) or in military training (military origin) everybody has been right because for all of these three roots evidence can be found. This is no wonder because, like everywhere, also the Buryats' economic, social, and political lives and their religious beliefs were always mutually influencing each other. Thus, as regards the three traditional sports of the Buryats, the study has shown that they originate in the Buryats' shamanistic sacrificial rituals as

well as in hunting, their main economic activity in the earliest state of their history, and in their military activities, which also played a crucial role in their lives throughout their history.

How, where, when, and by whom the competitions were carried out changed in the course of history, because political, economic, and social changes occurred which caused changes in many, if not all spheres of the Buryats' life including most often also their sports. How in particular the sports were affected by those changes differed from case to case.

With regard to *political changes* that affected the sports and the holidays, the heaviest impact on them had the several dominion and leadership changes the Buryat society underwent—from the Mongolian system of rising and falling khans to the subjection under the Russian tsars to Soviet communist party rule to post-Soviet partial democratization. All rulers and ruling institutions utilized the holidays for demonstrating their specific pomp and splendors and for propagating their ideologies by filling the holidays in every respect and in any particular sphere with their specific epithets and symbols—in the naming of the holidays, in their programming, in the decorations, in the opening ceremonies, announcements, award ceremonies, prizes, etc.—and by taking the stage and delivering oral messages to the gathered (sometimes commandeered) visitors and athletes. In this respect little differences between the various political and religious leaders, both historical and current ones, can be found. All of them have intensively tried, or try today, to use these popular sports competitions' "inherent qualities of being easily understood and enjoyed" and "being capable of generating mass enthusiasm"<sup>1002</sup> (which they share with most popular sports anywhere), for gaining *cultural hegemony*, which, as Gramsci has shown, is vital for securing and maintaining power.

A noticeable impact on the holidays was also made by administrative reforms, especially revisions of administrative units, because, after they were established most of the sports holidays have been carried out in accordance to these units. This, usually, had a significant effect on identity construction and reinforcement processes among the Buryats, as they belonged to that unit whose holiday they attended. These units' definitions shifted from having been kinship based (tribes, clans) in Tsarist times to being region based (District, Region, Republic) in the Soviet period, a situation which prevails still today. Recent attempts of the Buddhist clergy to

---

<sup>1002</sup> Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 7.

induce ‘datsan identities’ by creating ‘datsan teams’ among the participating athletes of the sports games at their monasteries have not been successful so far.

Very important *economic changes* that affected the sports and the holidays were changing forms of *land ownership*. In the course of history they changed from the collective ownership by the clan to private ownership, then to kolkhoz ownership, and then back to private ownership. All these changes reflected and, as regards the last change, reflect today in the holidays and the sports competitions both in terms of who was or is participating in them—the members of a clan, the members of a kolkhoz, the residents of a certain administrative unit; horses from private horse breeders or from kolkhoz studs or from datsans—and in which mode they were carried out, that is, whether teams or single athletes competed or compete against each other.

The overall economic situation also always reflected in the holidays and in how the sports were practiced. When the economy was in dire straits the holidays were carried out modestly and the athletes suffered from lack of equipment (bows, wrestling boots, etc.) and other basic needs (e.g. transportation to events); when the economy was booming the holidays became pompous festivals and the athletes appeared well equipped.

In regard to *cultural changes* that affected the sports and the holidays, changing religious affiliations of the majority of the Buryats in the course of history had a substantial impact. Buryat communities went from solely adhering to animistic-shamanistic beliefs to an adoption (by and large) of Buddhism, to communist ersatz religion, and back again to shamanism and Buddhism. The respective symbols, paraphernalia, and epithets of these religions and ideologies dominated at the holidays and these religions’ main agents—shamans, Buddhist lamas, party and state functionaries—led and controlled both the ritualistic parts of the holidays and the sports competitions at the times they respectively dominated in society in general.

The decline of Buryat culture and the efforts to reverse it also had clear consequences for traditional Buryat sports and sports holidays. For example, towards the end of the Soviet period, the wearing of traditional Buryat costumes became outmoded and was almost completely discontinued and the traditional Buryat bows went extinct. Instead modern, Western sports attire was worn and plastic bows were used. Today both Buryat wrestlers and archers (have to) wear again traditional costumes, and the archers use bows at least reminiscent of traditional Buryat bows.

With regard to the question, which role did and do magic, cults, religions, and in particular religious institutions and leaders play in Buryat sports, the study first revealed that beliefs in the magic power of the three traditional sports are one of the origins of these sports and are still widespread among the Buryats today. Therefore competitions in these sports have been linked to both shamanistic and Buddhist ceremonies and both shamans and Buddhist lamas have supported and, at the same time, controlled these competitions. Furthermore, whole Buddhist clerical institutions (monasteries) and organizations (mainly the Buddhist Traditional Sanghkha of Russia) have been engaged in promoting these sports.

The answer to the question, why today the Buryat Buddhist clergy so strongly promote the three traditional sports, lies in a simple equation, which is explained by the following. Of those who today promote and support the preservation and/or revival of traditional Buryat cultural features in general, the largest and most influential group is the Buryat Buddhist clergy. Members of the Buryat intelligentsia—especially folklorists and ethnographers, but others as well—have done so too and had some success, but that of the Buddhist clergy was, and still is, by far greater—especially in regards to sports. Most of the Buryat Buddhist lamas come from rural areas and it is these areas where their influence is greatest, because there the promotion of a traditional—or *traditionalistic*—lifestyle falls on particularly fertile ground. It, however, does so among many urban Buryats as well, as they, after decades of Soviet unitary culture, also have a great desire for showing, sharing and experiencing their ‘Buryatness’ in whatever form and way. Such widespread admiration of traditions (or of what is considered tradition) creates a fertile base for traditional religions as well. Thus, by supporting and fostering a revival of traditional Buryat customs, values, and ways of living, the Buddhist clergy lay the groundwork for a revival of Buddhism as well. The great success they had—today Buddhism is huge again in Buryatia!—proves that their strategy, from their point of view, was absolutely right. Their fostering of the traditional Buryat sports has been a part of this strategy, and a large and influential one, as sports, like everywhere, also in Buryatia attract masses of people, who, in addition, are usually in a good mood—thus the whole setting provides an excellent space for conveying and insemminating ideological messages.

The Buddhist clergy has been deliberately and openly using this property of the Buryat sports for “the recovery of the Buryat people and to uplift their intellect as well as [their]



*spirituality*,”<sup>1003</sup> meaning by the latter of course Buddhism, and, as stated, they have been successful. This development is one example of the understudied “relationships between sports and major world religions other than particular forms of Christianity,”<sup>1004</sup> and one which shows “the significant part that sport” in these relationships “can play in the development of religious identity,” as has been detected, for example, for Japanese Sumo wrestling in regard to the Shinto religion.<sup>1005</sup> In the Buryat case it is the “three games of men,” which play this role for Buddhist identity.

The recent global assertion of market economy and the significantly increased mobility of people, information, thoughts, and goods also significantly influenced the sporting activities of the Buryats. The transition to market economy reflected and still reflects in the Buryat sports holidays in the increasing presence of commercial companies as sponsors. As regards the increased mobility, some Buryat sportsmen made use of the new, post-Soviet possibilities and left for other regions in Russia or even for other countries. The most prominent example is Anatoliy Mikhakhanov, the Buryat wrestler who left in the late 1990s for Japan to become a Sumo wrestler.

Another recent development is that numerous new sports and sportslike activities became popular in Buryatia—in particular various martial arts and power sports. These developments did, however, not impede the popularity of the traditional Buryat sports. Statistical surveys carried out by the Agency of Physical Culture and Sports of the government of the Republic of Buryatia show that behind the ball games, volleyball, soccer, and basketball, wrestling is the fourth most popular sport in Buryatia. The ball games are leading in these statistics, because they are most popular among the *Russian* youth. Among the *Buryat* youth, especially among boys, wrestling is the most popular sport, and is even further gaining popularity since the Buddhist clergy started to organize a great amount of tournaments. The same holds true for archery, which recently became particularly popular among Buryat girls.<sup>1006</sup>

---

<sup>1003</sup> Makhachkeyev and Naguslayeva, *Bukhe barildaan*, 152, emphasis mine. See above, p. 259.

<sup>1004</sup> Coakley, *Sport in Society*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, 561. See above, p. 10.

<sup>1005</sup> Magdalinski and Chandler, “With God on their Side,” 13.

<sup>1006</sup> The agency has provided me with statistical data for the years 2002 and 2009 respectively. During the course of these seven years, the numbers of students enrolled in *seksii* (i.e. clubs affiliated to schools) for those five sports had changed as follows: the number for basketball declined from 11,864 to 10,074, whereas the numbers for volleyball, soccer, freestyle wrestling, and archery all increased—that for volleyball from 13,792 to 16,286, that for soccer from 9,675 to 12,332, that for freestyle wrestling from 6,739 to 7,315, and that for archery from 1,990 to

### *About the 'three games of men' as a mirror of society*

That the Buryat sports and sports holidays can be viewed as a mirror of society becomes evident by the fact that numerous social and cultural features of Buryat society, and in particular values, world views, normative demands, and rules operating the society in general were and are reflected in holidays and competitions.

The eagle dance of the wrestlers, the singing of the bara (the praise song sung to good archers honoring and thanking the spirit of the taiga), butter sacrificed to the spirit of the bay (the archery target resembling a Cossack fort), these and other symbols that are used, and rituals that are performed during Buryat sports competitions are of a clear shamanistic origin and character. Thus the Buryats' *shamanistic worldview* always was and still is reflected in their traditional sports and sports holidays.

The dominance *Buddhism* has gained among the Buryats, too, is reflected in manifold ways in their traditional sports and sports holidays. Three prominent examples are: in Tsarist times the most pompous sports holidays were organized by the Buddhist clergy to accompany Buddhist sacramental ceremonies, and this has been resumed after the fall of the Soviet Union; second, even at Buryat sports holidays, which are not organized by the Buddhist clergy, most often nonetheless Buddhist symbols are present and usually a Buddhist lama is the most honored guest at these events also; third, the three sports themselves have been spiritually linked with Buddhist deities.

*Soviet ideology* was similarly omnipresent at holidays during the Soviet period. Surkharbans were organized as festivals of the newly established kolkhozes, administrative units, and the Buryat(-Mongolian) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, thus reinforced these new communities to which the Buryat 'Soviet' citizens now belonged and the holidays were extensively used for state and party propaganda.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union it is the symbols of its successor state—the *Russian Federation*—that dominate at the festivals. Now in the first place *Russian patriotism* is propagated by the politicians, however along with some Buryat nostalgia as well. Recently also party propaganda has reappeared: representatives of president Putin's party "United Russia" take pride of place at the festivals and award to the winners of the competitions prizes donated by the

---

2,226. Volleyball remained ranked the most popular sport, while basketball and soccer switched places two and three, freestyle wrestling kept the fourth place position, and archery advanced from eleventh to ninth place.

party. At the same time the recent transition to *market economy* can be felt very strongly at the festivals also, as advertisement and sponsoring by private companies has become vital for their organization.

With regard to traditional values represented in the sports competitions, first the Buryats' extraordinary *great respect for the elderly* can be mentioned. It is reflected in the age-old and still today upheld custom that a wrestling tournament always starts with a symbolic or imitative bout between two elderly men who usually had been famous wrestlers in their youth.<sup>1007</sup> Only after that the real tournament starts. The elderly also always got the best seats among the spectators at the holidays and get them still today. These Buryat customs, especially the symbolic opening wrestling match between the two elderly men is a vivid confirmation of MacClancy's statement that sports "may be used [...] to give physical expression to certain social values."<sup>1008</sup>

Some character traits that Buryats most highly value, and which in fact are widespread among them, appear in all three sports as advantageous, if not crucial qualities for achieving success. These are *to be calm and patient*, but at the same time *persistent and untiring*, and *to be able to stay focused* on something. These qualities are as important as physical skills for success in Buryat wrestling and horse racing and probably of an even higher importance for Buryat archery. Therefore these sports indeed seem to suit many Buryats very well. By practicing them they, again, "give physical expression to certain social values," in this case to even some, which to hold on, contributes to success in the competitions.

In the Buryat sports and sports holidays also *kinship*, *ethnic*, and *power relations* were and, as concerns the ethnic and power relations, are still reflected, but in which particular ways has changed over time. As regards *kinship relations*, they played a role insofar, as they were showcased, and thus reaffirmed and strengthened at the holidays in pre-Tsarist and Tsarist times, as at that time the holidays most often were either organized and attended by the members of only one clan or were inter-clan events, but at which each clan fielded its own wrestlers, archery teams, and horses. As mentioned above, this changed in Soviet times, as the holidays' organizing units became the kolkhozes and the newly established administrative units. Thus, production and political units replaced the kinship based units as the communities which organized and gathered at the holidays—a change which has never been reversed.

---

<sup>1007</sup> Dashiyeva, *Buryatskiye taylagany*, 54.

<sup>1008</sup> MacClancy, "Sport, Identity and Ethnicity," 7. See above, p. 61.

As regards *ethnic relations*, the for the most part good, or at least calm relations between ethnic groups in Buryatia, including that between the two by far largest groups—the Russians and the Buryats—extend also into the sphere of sports. This also holds true for the ‘Buryat’ sports holidays Surkharban and Eryn gurban naadan. At them, already since Soviet times, Russians frequently participate in the competitions and are treated absolutely equally. Whereas I have witnessed some tense situations between Buryats and Russians at other occasions, I have never seen such at sports events.

As to *power relations*, the holidays have always very clearly revealed who holds power, and this the holidays do so still today. In pre-Tsarist times, the khans and the tribe and clan leaders had their personal wrestlers who, with their wins, enhanced their lord’s prestige. This tradition was taken up also by the Buddhist clergy after they became not only in religious regards but also politically the leading force. Then their monasteries also had their own wrestlers—a tradition they try to revitalize today. Already revitalized is the custom that the winning wrestlers of every match bow to the highest present lama to receive his blessings. The increasing influence of the Buddhist clergy in general in Buryatia in recent years manifests in the realm of sports also insofar as also the number of competitions organized by them has increased, as do the values of the prizes they award to the winners. At Soviet, and likewise at post-Soviet, state organized sports holidays the power hierarchy was made, and still is, very clear also: the higher an individual’s position, the more significant is his or her role at the holidays in regards to speaking time, involvement in prize giving ceremonies, etc.

This study also reveals what kind of *gender relations* have existed in former times and exist today in Buryat sporting activities and how they did and do correspond with the general developments in this regard in the society at large. By name, and thus by definition, the three traditional Buryat sports are ‘three games of *men*.’ When they were carried out as part of shamanistic sacrificial ceremonies, women were, due to the spiritual logic of the patrilineal genealogical system, not allowed to participate. This principle was also adopted by the Buddhist clergy. However, with the exception of these restrictions, the female members of the Buryat society always enjoyed high social status. Therefore women participated in *secular* archery competitions. Also Buryat girls could be riders in the horse races. Only wrestling was an exclusively male domain. During the Soviet period, although no competitions as part of religious rituals were allowed, women nonetheless were secluded from participating in the archery

competitions for a long time. Only in the late-1960s, when women in general entered many, formerly men-only spheres of the Soviet society, were women archery competitions introduced.

Today the situation is ambiguous. Although Buryat female archers are outnumbering their male colleagues and are also more successful than them in competitions in international archery, they are not very welcome at competitions in Buryat archery organized by the Buddhist clergy, that is, at the majority of competitions of this style. However, the Buddhist clergy itself is split in this regard. Right now the compromise seems to be that they do not forbid women to participate, but do not encourage them either. As regards Buryat wrestling, it is still a clear male domain. Women are not allowed to participate. Yet, I have seen *girls* participating in Buryat wrestling tournaments (which were not organized by the Buddhist clergy) and I believe that this will become more and more common in the future, as wrestling in general—that is, both Olympic and Buryat wrestling—becomes more and more popular among girls and women in Buryatia.

The exclusion of women from Buryat wrestling and the ambiguous or indecisive treatment of female archers by today's leading organizers of traditional Buryat sports competitions—i.e. the Buddhist clergy—is an example of a representation in the sports of a general antagonism or conflict going on in Buryat society. Like in many societies worldwide, also in Buryatia emancipation of women conflicts with conservative gender role models. The Buddhist lamas are more inclined to these conservative models, yet, as it seems, with some doubts.

In general, during the whole history, antagonisms and conflicts ongoing in Buryat society at large between adherents of old and new values or, in other words, between tradition and modernity, were reflected in the Buryat sports. This can be clearly traced, for instance, in the various rule changes for Buryat archery and Buryat wrestling during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Many of these changes were not unanimously backed by those concerned. Just as among the Buryat people in general, also among Buryat sportspeople always have been both conservatives and reformers. In the present process of re-traditionalizing Buryat sports, this can be seen particularly clearly. So far in this process for the most part the conservatives have dictated the direction. Yet there was, and still is, some resistance. Examples are, that women *are* participating in the archery competitions organized by the Buddhist clergy, that many archers very broadly interpret the rules of how their bow has to look and which features it may have, and that for a long period no consensus could be achieved about whether belt wrestling should be

(re)introduced or not, as one argued about whether it was actually traditional and, if it was, whether it makes sense in the modern world.

Thus, Buryat traditional sports constitute a shining example that in sports, ambiguities and conflicts are always present, as in society in general, a fact to which, as outlined in Chapter 1, Henning Eichberg has pointed. For instance, the different body cultures of men and women and of young and old people are always visible in sports; but also regional differences, like those between the cis- and trans-Baikal Buryats in regard to particularities of their wrestling and archery competitions as described in the respective chapters, and the divergent opinions of the conservatives and the reformers break through in the competitions, especially at large events, at which many, and thus many different people gather. Thus, how particular sports are played is “not etched in stone” and they “can divide as much as [they] may unite,” as MacClancy has rightly stated.<sup>1009</sup> As shown in this study, Buryat traditional sports were and are no exception to this.

Differences, disagreements, and conflicts visible and ongoing in sports, that is, between certain groups of athletes and organizers, often mirror differences, disagreements, and conflicts prevalent in society in general. Therefore the study of sports may reveal or at least shed bright light on them, thus can lead to a better understanding of social, economic, and political developments in society at large. The mentioned Buryat examples point to ambiguities in regard to gender roles, to diverging appreciations of traditional and new behaviors and phenomena, and to tensions between cis- and trans-Baikal Buryats, all of which are indeed present in today’s Buryat society.

As in society in general, in sports contradictions and conflicts are negotiated and/or fought out. This ideally leads to compromises, but in any case to results, which leave not everybody satisfied. Examples in the sphere of traditional Buryat sports are the various rule changes, as none of them was, as described, appreciated by everyone concerned. This is of course also not an exceptional Buryat case, but just one more which confirms that developments in sports are practically everywhere processes of negotiations of contradictions and ambiguities, which hardly ever anywhere come to a definitive end. Thus, to “think” developments in sports „dialectically,“ as Eichberg stated,<sup>1010</sup> that is, to not paint a harmonic, static picture of sports, but always to

---

<sup>1009</sup> MacClancy, “Sport, Identity and Ethnicity,” 11.

<sup>1010</sup> Eichberg, “Olympische und andere Bewegungskulturen,” 107.

factor in the contradictions and the *processes* of their negotiations, is necessary for their understanding as well as for the understanding of the social conditions and changes which reflect in them. The Buryat sports can be understood definitely only in that way.

This, however, does not mean that there are absolutely no cases of developments in, or regarding, sports, which come to an end. One such case is the attempted linking of traditional Buryat sports with the epic hero Geser. This attempt clearly failed and is unlikely to reemerge. It is an example for a failed ‘invented tradition,’ a possibility which sometimes seems to be deemed impossible, but of which this Buryat case reminds us. In regard to the Buryat society it shows that the Buryat intelligentsia has little influence on the ordinary Buryat people, especially when it comes to popular culture.

In summary, the study could show that many *social conditions* (e.g. kinship ties, gender relations, class relations, ethnic relations, etc.), *economic conditions* (e.g. collective or private land ownership), *political conditions* (e.g. rulerships and administrative divisions), and *cultural conditions* (e.g. religious affiliation, decline or revival of traditions) in Buryatia have affected and still affect Buryat sports.

As regards the question whether specific Buryat social conditions and values influence *how* Buryat sportsmen and sportswomen act in their sports, for instance, whether specific Buryat styles and tactics in wrestling differ from those of wrestlers from other societies, an affirmative answer can be given. The ‘rule of the three dots,’ which derives from the mounted form of warfare the Buryats have carried out for ages, causes Buryat wrestlers to move very cautiously and to wait very patiently for the right moment for an attack. This skill and attitude gives Buryat wrestlers often an advantage over other wrestlers in competitions in Olympic wrestling styles. As regards Buryat equestrian sports, they are clearly positively affected by the great importance which horses had for the once nomadic Buryats and by their therefore great admiration of these animals. Notwithstanding the drastic decrease of the economic as well as military significance of horses in the course of the twentieth century, and in spite of the Soviet modernization and mechanization cult, the Buryats kept their love for horses alive and more than a few among them never discontinued to engage in horse breeding. As mentioned, even in completely mechanized kolkhozes “horse herds were kept [...] with amblers, geldings and stallions specially set aside for racing purposes.”<sup>1011</sup> The horse races always were and still are considered the climax of the

---

<sup>1011</sup> Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective*, 381. See p. 233.

sports festivals, equaled only by the final wrestling match for the title of the ‘absolute champion’. Today, due to efforts of the Buddhist clergy, the breeding of horses of the Buryat breed—nearly extinct in the course of the twentieth century—has significantly gained ground.

The study also revealed reflections of various post-Soviet and recent global developments in the Buryat sports and sports holidays. Various, in some cases dramatic, specifically *post-Soviet* economic and political developments, that is, such pertaining to the Russian Federation, heavily affected the Buryat sports and sports holidays. Examples are the economic and humanitarian crisis in the 1990s, which impeded the development of Buryat sports for years, and then the new fostering of a new, Russian patriotism, and the *de facto* reintroduction of a one-party state, which both very noticeably shape the sports holidays’ ceremonial parts today.

Global developments also had an impact, but not so much on the three sports. Although people’s and ideas’ mobility as well as the flow of information have enormously increased in the last two to three decades, this had little impact on the three Buryat *sports*. Their deliberate re-traditionalization did not provide much room for implementations of new global fashions into them. Thus, the three traditional Buryat sports are an exemplary case which confirms that there was and is no global cultural hegemony in sports. “[G]lobalization has not reduced heterogeneity,” Ingrid Kummels rightly stated.<sup>1012</sup> The plurality of sports, to which Eichberg has pointed already decades ago at the height of the neocolonial spread of Western sports, remains, as indigenous and local sport traditions live on and flourish. The “three games of men” of the Buryats are an example of the widespread resistance against this type of Western, capitalist, cultural hegemony on local levels.

However, the ways in which the Buryat sports *holidays* have been organized in recent years, and in particular the ones organized by the state authorities, clearly show influence of global trends: they became commercialized, entertainment-oriented mega events showing many of the same features such events bear everywhere in the world today. This mixture is one more ambiguity in the sphere of Buryat traditional sports—one which can be best described with a term which in itself bears this ambiguity, and which was invented in order to explain phenomena like this properly: today “The Three Games of Men” are an exhibit A of *glocalization*.

Concerning the global economic crises, that is, the cyclic crises of capitalism to which the successor states of the Soviet Union, since its fall, are exposed to as well, a similar ambiguity

---

<sup>1012</sup> Kummels, “Anthropological Perspectives on Sport and Culture,” 22.



appears. The global economic crisis which started in 2008 did not have much impact on Buryatia in general, because it affected highly developed economies much more than ones which needed to make up a great backlog, which the Buryat economy, after its total crash in the 1990s, had to. Thus this crisis did also not much affect the Buryat sports. By contrast, the new crisis triggered by the falling oil prices, the trade sanctions imposed on Russia by the U.S., the European Union, and other countries, and the therefore falling ruble since 2014, has a significant negative impact on the economy of the Republic of Buryatia, including the Republic's budget. It is still too early for determining how this will affect the sports, but most likely in a tangibly negative way.

In conclusion we can say that the case of the traditional Buryat is one more clear proof that “the realm of sports as a societal subsystem provides revealing insight into larger processes.”<sup>1013</sup>

### *About the social functions of the ‘three games of men’*

This study revealed a number of *social functions* and *utilizations* of the Buryat traditional sports and sports holidays:

#### *Religious (cultic-magic) functions*

The games and feasts were always considered symbolic gifts to deities, ancestral and protecting spirits, in order to delight and propitiate them and therewith to ensure to stay protected and supported by them. During the Soviet period the competitions could not openly bear this function. Today the Buryats again organize the competitions for their original magic-cultic purpose, which they never lost for them, as parts of both shamanistic sacrificial rituals and Buddhist ceremonies.

---

<sup>1013</sup> Katrin Bromber, Birgit Krawietz and Joseph Maguire, “Introduction: From Asian Sports to Sport in Asia,” in *Sport Across Asia: Politics, Cultures, and Identities*, ed. Katrin Bromber, Birgit Krawietz and Joseph Maguire (Routledge: New York, 2013), 9.

### *Military functions*

Prior to the use of firearms and modern means of transportation, the three sports were perfect practices for war for both men and horses. In addition, the competitions were used by khans and clan leaders for recruiting the members of their ‘special forces.’

### *Economic functions*

In former times the sports competitions were always held after—and in some cases also before—the collective hunts, which were an important economic activity up to the nineteenth century. For them masses of people gathered, which made them perfect occasions for retail market trade. This function the Buryat sports holidays have retained until the present day. Today they are in addition also a top occasion for commercial advertisement and sponsorship.

### *Utilizations for promoting ideologies*

As the Buryat sports holidays have always been true mass gatherings, they were always used by the ruling elites for their propaganda purposes and are still used for this today: shamans and Buddhist lamas played the leading role at ‘their’ respective events, which consisted of their (slightly) distinct religious rituals but of competitions in the same three sports and an exuberant feast in any case; the Tsarist authorities organized such events for creating and reinforcing the loyalty of the Buryats to the Tsar; the Soviet functionaries propagated and praised at the holidays the new life they have created for the Buryats, no matter whether it was good or not. The politicians which take the stage at the Surkharbans today do exactly the same for what they have created; the Buddhist lamas use the “Three Games of Men” they organize for telling the gathered crowd how to live a proper life in the Buddhist way; and commercial companies try to claim their indispensableness by sponsoring significant financial means and aim in their advertisements at convincing people that they need their merchandise.

### *Identity constructing and identity strengthening functions*

This study has shown that in former times the sports holidays were deliberately utilized for these purposes by the khans and clan leaders, the Buddhist clergy, the Tsarist administration, and the Soviet authorities. The same did and still do all the post-Soviet competitors for influence in the Buryat society—the state authorities, the party (United Russia), the Buddhist clergy, and commercial companies, thus by anyone who holds some power in Buryatia. In recent years however, not only such top-down processes in regard to the construction and reinforcement of identities appeared, but also bottom-up, or self-organized initiatives. Examples are, for instance, the Surkharbans of the students of universities of Ulan-Ude and—also in Ulan-Ude—the Surkharbans organized by groups of townspeople originating from the same rural area. Thus, over the times various different, however often also overlapping identities have been constructed and tried to strengthen with the help of the holidays: being a member of a certain clan, being Buryat, being a member of a certain kolkhoz, being a resident of a certain administrative unit, being Buddhist, belonging to a certain datsan, studying at a certain university, working for the same company, etc. Important historical examples are the Republic Surkharbans organized by the authorities of the Buryat-Mongolian Soviet Socialist Republic before its dismemberment, which significantly contributed to the development of an all-Buryat identity. Although traditional Buryat customs were actually curtailed at these festivities, they constituted the first large-scale events which united cis- and trans-Baikal Buryats.

In the post-Soviet period, in contrast to what the Soviet authorities had done, *deliberate* stress was, and still is, laid on the ‘Buryat’ character of the traditional sports and sports holidays. Therefore today, most of these events contribute to a reinforcement of a Buryat *ethnic* identity. What happened was that after the fall of the Soviet Union “the consciousness about one’s own national body culture,” which “has never disappeared,” also “broke through” among the Buryats as it did among many other ethnic groups of the former Soviet Union, as Eichberg had correctly predicted.<sup>1014</sup> Of course, it did not do this by itself, but it was people who did this; people who had differing aims and ideas. This also can be best comprehended by Eichberg’s formulation of the ways identities can be constructed by means of ‘movement’ or ‘body cultures’ and can be related to *who* aimed or aims at *what* in this process

---

<sup>1014</sup> Eichberg, “A Revolution of Body Culture?,” 131, 134. See above, p. 81.

The state authorities' main goal is still the securing of the loyalty of the people to their state (i.e. the Russian Federation at this time). Therefore they aim at arousing patriotic feelings, and thus are protagonists of the *identity of production*, because such feelings can most simply be aroused, if the nation is "understood as [...] competing with other nations,"<sup>1015</sup> and thus for them sports need to be international, result and ranking orientated, achievement sports. That is why they, for a long time, opposed revocations of the internationalized rules of the competitions introduced during the Soviet period and foster the introduction of such rules for the newly revived traditional Buryat games with sheep bones.

As both the state authorities and the Buddhist clergy are interested in inseminating their respective world views into their followers in the best possible uniform way, they both are protagonists of the *identity of integration*. Therefore mass choreographies at the state organized Surkharbans and parades and recurring rituals at both the state-organized Surkharbans and the clergy-organized Eryn gurban naadans are deliberately and amply staged and play a very prominent role in these events.

As regards the *popular identity*, which, according to Eichberg, emerges from an emancipated civil society by means of self organization, its manifestations first and foremost appear at the small, more or less self-organized Surkharbans of groups like people living in Ulan-Ude who come from the same rural district, people who live in the same neighborhood, students of a particular university, or people who work for the same company or branch of the administration. At such events formalized rituals are usually few and short, but the competitions are taken quite seriously and carried out as much as possible in accordance with the official rules. Thus, although the 'culture of laughter' preponderates at these events, they are not free of 'seriousness of (attempted) professionalism.' In turn, at competitions organized by the state (Republic or District) authorities, or by the Buddhist clergy, the participating athletes still have some leeway in the interpretation or application of the rules. Bows used by the archers that are often only faintly reminiscent of a traditional Buryat bow are one example. Others are the mentioned cases of girls participating in competitions in Buryat wrestling and female archers competing with men at the "Three Games of *Men*", and a case which I once witnessed at such an event, when all the archers who participated performed so poorly in the first round that they decided to do it again and then let almost all advance into the next round. These are cases in which clearly the desire of

---

<sup>1015</sup> Eichberg, "The Nation in Movement," 6. See above, p. 85.

having fun prevailed over a professional competitive attitude and where official restrictions were not enforced. Such cases are however exceptions to the rule. In general ‘popular identity’ is the weakest of the three identity models of Eichberg in Buryatia today. This corresponds with the general state of the civil society there. It exists, but it is weak.

### *Community strengthening functions*

Despite the serious competitiveness and the ritualistic ceremonies, the holidays are today, as in former times, still characterized by a festive, cheerful, and frolicsome atmosphere. This has always made them an excellent occasion for meeting and communicating with other members of the group and for establishing and strengthening relationships. This was an especially important social function in the times, when the Buryats still lived a nomadic life, when large get-togethers occurred very rarely. In rural areas this is still today one of the most important functions the holidays fulfill. There also the formalized ritualistic parts of the holidays are shorter and less pathetic than, for instance, at the Republic Surkharban. A Surkharban in a village is truly a feast for the people at which socializing and having fun is much more important than the results of the competitions.

### *Health promoting functions*

For all occasions holds true that the participating athletes in the sports competitions of a Buryat sports holidays were and are directly engaged in healthy activities, because doing sports by itself is a healthy activity and because the rules and regulations in force in the traditional Buryat sports minimize the risk of injury to almost zero. I have never seen any archer, wrestler, or spectator getting hurt and only once I saw a boy falling off a race horse, but he was immediately taken care of by a doctor and a few moments later he was okay again. In addition, the feasts provide recreation, conviviality, and comfort for all visitors.

Another health promotion related utilization of the traditional Buryat sports is that today Buryat wrestling and archery are deliberately used in Buryatia in projects designed for getting homeless or unattended children and juveniles off the streets<sup>1016</sup> (who are unfortunately numerous all over Russia, because of widespread alcoholism also among parents of young

---

<sup>1016</sup> Bato-Munko Biliktuyev, personal communication, Kurumkan (Buryatia), June 2011.

children). In turn, a health promotion related characteristic of one of the three sports concerns in particular the elderly. This is that Buryat archery is a sport in which people can participate up to old age and often quite successfully. Therefore it is the number one sport for seniors among the Buryats.

### *Educational functions*

Children and juveniles who practice sports—no matter where in the world and no matter what particular sports—learn in a playful, and thus safe manner fundamental social values and rules of conduct. It is safe for them, because in sports—like in any other game—they “model [...] in *symbolic* [...] form the activities and attitudes important in their culture,” as Donald Calhoun had boiled down also this matter to its essence in his statement already two times quoted above.<sup>1017</sup> This symbolic, ‘not real’ character of play, games, and sports, which Bateson had pointed out, entails that to fail in a sports competition has no, or at least considerably less serious, consequences than to fail in an activity in ‘real life.’ This, of course, holds also true for the youngsters of Buryatia. When they practice the traditional Buryat sports they in particular learn and/or enhance the above mentioned, among Buryats highly valued virtues and qualities of being calm and patient, but at the same time persistent and untiring. Buryat sports have been fulfilling this educational or pedagogical function at all times and they fulfil it still today.

### *Life enhancing function*

In addition to health benefits, practicing one or more of the traditional Buryat sports, and participating in competitions in them, has some more positive effects for the athletes. Like sports anywhere, also the Buryat sports competitions provide for their participants such opportunities as to increase one’s personal prestige, to broaden one’s social network, and—what often was, and still is, of greatest importance—opportunities to travel and “to see the world.” Especially for the rural youth in Buryatia these sports competitions constitute one of only a few possibilities for achieving all this. In addition, today, due to the opportunity to earn significant prize money at an increasing number of competitions, participating successfully in Buryat traditional sports significantly improves even some athlete’s financial situation.

---

<sup>1017</sup> Calhoun, *Sport, Culture, and Personality*, 62, emphasis mine. See above, pp. 61 and 264.

## Conclusions

The main results of this study are the following:

First, the traditional sports of the Buryats, the competitions in them, and the holidays and festivals at which they are organized have always been, and still are, *central social activities in Buryat society*, because (1) they have fulfilled numerous important functions in and for Buryat society throughout their history and do so still today; (2) they have always been very popular and audience-grabbing; (3) at all times, those who needed the support and loyalty of the masses—i.e. political leaders, clergymen, and businessmen—utilized them for their purposes.

Second, because the traditional sports were, and still are, central social activities in Buryat society, they have mirrored socio-economic, political, and religious conditions and beliefs, prevailing in Buryat society at any time, and do so still today and thus did and do *mirror social change*.

In particular, sports involve the whole spectrum of society's members, both influential members—khans, shamans, Buddhist lamas, Soviet functionaries, post-Soviet politicians, businessmen, members of the intelligentsia, etc.—and the common people, thus, makes them a mirror of that society and of the social processes going on in it. Major and also many minor socio-economic, political, and spiritual shifts and changes the Buryat society underwent in former times and undergoes today are therefore reflected in the changes the sports and the festivals underwent and undergo. These include *economic changes* (e.g. the decline of the economic importance of horses reflected by the absence of horse races at many Surkharbans in the late-Soviet and early post-Soviet period; the collectivization reflected by the shift from kinship based to production unit based holidays; the introduction of market economy reflected by sponsorship of private companies, etc.), *changing political leadership* (reflected by who is organizing the competitions), *varying religious affiliations* (reflected by whether a shaman or Buddhist lamas play the leading role at the festival), *changing and varying gender relations* (reflected by the degree of women's participation in the competitions), *changing values and normative demands* (reflected by the behavior of the attendees of the events, for example whether they wear traditional Buryat costumes or not), *cultural changes* (for example the new

appreciation of traditional Buryat culture in the post-Soviet period reflected, for instance, by the restitution of traditional Buryat costumes), and so on.

Thus, the posed question “which economic, social, political, and cultural *changes* in and of the Buryat society were and are reflected in Buryat traditional sports?” can be answered with stating that indeed very many of these changes, and definitely all major ones, were and are reflected in these sports.

Third, the traditional Buryat sports or, more precisely, the people actively engaged in them, i.e. the sportsmen, sportswomen, officials, spectators, and supporters, have contributed, and still contribute to the *production of social change*.

The Buryats like any other of the ex-Soviet peoples experienced an arduous transition from a state controlled planned economy to one dominated by a free market and from widely predetermined personal biographies to the necessity of a much more self-responsible life planning.<sup>1018</sup> This increase in self-determination, however, has given Buryats more options to choose from and more opportunities at their disposal. For instance, the opening of the borders has allowed many of them to travel and has also opened the door to all kinds of migration, including that of sportsmen and sportswomen. Furthermore, modernized mass media, a relatively free press, widespread wireless telecommunication technology, and the internet significantly increased the amount of information people even in remote Siberian villages may gain. In summary, since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Buryat society underwent and continues to undergo processes of profound change affecting all spheres of life, including sporting activities. However, in many of these processes—the new liberties and possibilities notwithstanding—the Buryat people have little say, for instance, as described, in political matters. Yet they have so in regard to their sports.

Already during Soviet times they did not completely follow the directives of the state authorities and party functionaries, when they still kept horses just for racing purposes and when they obtained the reintroduction of the wrestling tournament without a weight-limit. In the post-Soviet period it was first single athletes, trainers, functionaries, and scientists who started and/or

---

<sup>1018</sup> See e.g. Caroline Humphrey, “Rural Institutions,” chapter 3 in *The End of Nomadism? Society, State and the Environment in Inner Asia*, ed. Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 78–90.



promoted the retraditionalization of the sports. Only later the Buddhist clergy and—after them—the state authorities jumped on the bandwagon. Both of them had to negotiate the terms—in particular the rules—of the competitions with those activists among the sportspeople, which in a number of cases (for instance the reintroduction of the waist belt) took a long time and in some cases is still ongoing (for instance as regards the distances in archery). Thus, it is those activists who for the most part map out the routes on which the “three games of men” develop, in other words, the Buryat sportspeople themselves have the strongest agency in their sports.

One result of the above mentioned post-Soviet developments in Buryat society is that various modernization processes also occurred in the sphere of sports in Buryatia. Most significantly, a number of newly arrived sport disciplines rapidly gained popularity, especially several Asian martial arts and various kinds of power sports. Thus, many Buryats made use of the new freedom of choice and the newly available options also in the realm of sports. Many of them however chose to stick with the Buryat traditional sports—and not only that: many actively engaged, or at least willingly followed the deliberate re-traditionalization of these sports and of the holidays at which they were organized. By this the Buryat sportspeople supported the Buddhist clergy who strongly promoted and fostered this re-traditionalization of the competitions’ and who re-embedded them into Buddhist contexts by organizing them at the *atsans* as part of Buddhist sacramental ceremonies. Although government institutions, both on the Republic and on the District levels, still organize big sports holidays, in which competitions in the same three sport disciplines play the major role, the competitions organized by the Buddhist clergy have outnumbered them by far and also surpassed them in regard to the value of the prizes awarded to the winners. As a result the competitions and sports holidays organized by them became very popular and attracted great numbers of people and do this still today. This significantly contributed to the rise of Buddhism in Buryatia in general. Thus, Buryat traditional sports as such, and the athletes as their active agents, contributed considerably to this significant social change in post-Soviet Buryatia.

## References:

### Newspapers and magazines:

<i>Agenstvo sporta.</i>	<i>Krasnaya Selenga.</i>	<i>Russian Life.</i>
<i>Buryaad unen.</i>	<i>Molodëzh' Buryatii.</i>	<i>Sayany.</i>
<i>Buryatiya.</i>	<i>Nedelya.</i>	<i>Sport-ekspress.</i>
<i>Buryatiya Sport.</i>	<i>Nomer odin.</i>	<i>Sport Tamir.</i>
<i>Dzhidinskaya pravda.</i>	<i>Novaya Buryatiya.</i>	<i>Surkharban.</i>
<i>The Huffington Post.</i>	<i>Panorama Buryatii.</i>	<i>Ugay zam.</i>
<i>Inform Polis.</i>	<i>Pravda Buryatii.</i>	<i>Znamya truda.</i>

### Books and articles:

#### Abbreviations:

AN	– Akademiya nauk
ASSR	– Avtonomnaya sovetskaya sotsialisticheskaya respublika
BION	– Buryatskiy institut obshchestvennykh nauk
BKNII	– Buryatskiy kompleksnyy nauchno-issledovatel'skiy institut
BMASSR	– Buryat-mongol'skaya avtonomnaya sovetskaya sotsialisticheskaya respublika
BNTs	– Buryatskiy nauchnyy tsentr
ChGIFKiS	– Churapchinskiy gosudarstvennyy institut fizicheskoy kul'tury i sporta
FGOU VPO	– Federal'noye gosudarstvennoye obrazovatel'noye uchrezhdeniye vysshego professional'nogo obrazovaniya
RAN	– Rossiyskaya akademiya nauk
SO	– Sibirskoye otdeleniye
SSSR	– Soyuz sovetskikh sotsialisticheskikh respublik
TuvIKOPR	– Tuvinskiy institut kompleksnogo osvoeniya prirodnikh resursov
VSGAKI	– Vostochno-Sibirskaya gosudarstvennaya akademiya kul'tury i iskusstv
YaNTs	– Yakutskiy nauchnyy tsentr

- Adler, Bruno. "Der nordasiatische Pfeil." *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* 14, supplement (1901): 1–40.
- . "Die Bogen Nordasiens." *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* 15 (1902): 1–27.
- Alekseyev, N. A., and A. G. Gombozhapov. "Obo takhilgan—gornoye moleniye aginskikh buryat." In *Etnografiya narodov Sibiri i Mongolii*. Ulan-Bator and Ulan-Ude: 2000.
- Alekseyev, V. P. "Domashnaya loshad' Mongolii." In *Arkheologicheskiye, etnograficheskiye i antropologicheskiye issledovaniya v Mongolii*, edited by A. P. Derevyanko and Sh. Natsagdorzh, 149–67. Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1990.
- Alkemeyer, Thomas. "Die Aufführungen des Sports und die Strukturen der sozialen Welt: Ansätze zu einer vom Spiel ausgehenden Soziologie." In *Sportsoziologie—Funktionen und Leistungen: Beiträge zur Jahrestagung der Sektion "Soziologie des Sports" in der DGS und der Sektion "Sportsoziologie" in der dvs, 28.–30. Juni 2001 in Erfurt*, edited by M. Klein, 168–89. Erfurt: Universität Erfurt, 2001.
- Altman, Bernard. "Working with Play." *The Child Care Worker* 4, 8 (1986): 10–12.
- Andreyev, Alexander I. "Dreams of a Pan-Mongolian state: Sandan Tsydenov, Baron Ungern, Agvan Dorjiev, Nicholas Roerich." <http://www.budcon.com/index.php/2013-03-14-08-21-28/2013-03-15-11-39-50/articles/78-dreams-of-a-pan-mongolian-state-sandan-tsydenov-baron-ungern-agvan-dorjiev-nicholas-roerich-by-alexander-i-andreyev>. Accessed March 27, 2015.
- Angeloni, Elvio, ed. *Anthropology*. Dubuque: McGraw Hill, 2008.
- Anuchin, Dmitriy N. "O drevnem luke i strelakh." *Trudy V arkheologicheskogo s'yezda v Tiflise 1881*, 337–411. Moskva: 1887.
- The Archer's Complete Guide or, Instructions for the Use of the Long Bow. By an Expert*. New York: Peck & Snyder, 1878.
- Avedon, Elliott. M., and Brian Sutton-Smith. *The Study of Games*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971.
- Babuyeva, Valentina D. *Material'naya i dukhovnaya kul'tura buryat*. Ulan-Ude: Tsentr sokhraneniya i razvitiya kul'turnogo naslediya Buryatii, 2004.
- Badmayev, Andrey A. *Remesla aginskikh buryat*. Novosibirsk: Institut arkheologii i etnografii SO RAN, 1997.

- Bakhayev, Vladimir B. “Imeyetsya li etnicheskaya i kul’turnaya svyaz’ mezhdru kurykanami i buryatami?” Otvet 2 na vopros no.12 [Second answer to question no. 12] in *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 1, edited by Taras M. Mikhaylov, 40–42. Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1990.
- Bakhayev, Vladimir B., and Irina N. Shagdurova. *Istoriya Buryatii*, part 1. Ulan-Ude: Belig, 1995.
- Baldayev, S. P. “Perezhitki shamanstva u buryat i mery bor’by s nimi.” In *Voprosy preodeleniya perezhitkov proshlogo v bytu i soznanii lyudey i stanovleniya novykh obychayev, obryadov i traditsiy u narodov Sibiri*, edited by Ts. B. Budayev, Taras M. Mikhaylov, and K. V. Sydenov, 23–26. Ulan-Ude: SO AN SSSR, 1966.
- Baldunnikov, Arkhip I. “K voprosu o zadachakh istoriko-etnograficheskogo issledovaniya buryat.” *Buryatiyevedeniye* 1–3 (5–7) (1928): 29–41.
- Bally, Gustav. *Vom Ursprung und von den Grenzen der Freiheit. Eine Deutung des Spiels bei Tier und Mensch*. Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1945.
- Banayeva, Monika G. “Buryaty Moskvyy: migratsii i opyt sotsiokul’turnoy adaptatsii.” *Etnograficheskoye obozreniye* 6 (2011): 39–57.
- Banzarov, Dorzhi. “Chernaya vera ili Shamanstvo u mongolov,” in *Chernaya vera ili Shamanstvo u mongolov*, edited by G. N. Potanin, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1–46. Moskva: Knizhnyy dom “LIBROKOM”, 2011. Originally published in *Uchenyye Zapiski Kazanskogo Universiteta* 3 (1846): 53–120. An English translation by Jan Nattier and John R. Krueger under the title “The Black Faith, or Shamanism Among the Mongols” has been published in *Mongolian Studies* 6 (1980): 53–91.
- Baradin, Bazar B. “Buryat-mongoly. Kratkiy istoricheskiy ocherk oformleniya buryat-mongol’skoy narodnosti.” *Buryatiyevedeniye* 3–4 (1927): 39–52.
- Bardamov, Gavril B., and Vladimir A. Fomin. “Vozrozhdeniye natsional’noy traditsii v sisteme sostyazatel’noy deyatel’nosti.” In *Vozrozhdeniye traditsionnykh kul’tur narodov Buryatii: Materialy nauchnoprakticheskoy konferentsii 14–15 maya 1998 g.*, 140–46. Ulan-Ude: Pravitel’stvo Respubliki Buryatiya, Rossiyskaya Akademiya nauk Sibirskoye otdeleniye, Baykal’skiy institut prirodopol’zovaniya, 1998.
- Bashkuyev, Gennadiy T. *Buryaty: traditsii i kul’tura / The Buryats: traditions and culture*. Ulan-Ude: Soyël, 1995.
- Bastian, Adolf. *Geographische und ethnologische Bilder*. Jena: Hermann Costenoble, 1873.

- Bateson, Gregory. "A Theory of Play and Fantasy." In *Play, Games and Sports in Cultural Contexts*, edited by Janet C. Harris and Roberta J. Park, 313–26. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1983. First published in *Psychiatric Research Reports* 2 (1955): 39–51.
- . *Steps to An Ecology of Mind*. San Francisco: Chandler, 1972.
- Batoyeva, Darima B., Galina R. Galdanova, Darima A. Nikolayeva, and Tat'yana D. Skrynnikova. *Obryady v traditsionnoy kul'ture buryat*. Moskva: Vostochnaya literatura, 2002.
- Batuyev, B. B. "Rasskazhite o zhizni i deyatel'nosti M. M. Sakh'yanovoy v Buryatii." In *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 2, edited by N. V. Kim, 101–6. Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1991.
- , ed. *Natsional'noye dvizheniye v Buryatii v 1917–1919 gg.* Ulan-Ude: Sibir', 1994.
- Baynov, Yevgeniy V., and Mariya Ye. Baynova. *Shatar—buryatskiye shakhmaty*. Ulan-Ude: Detsko-yunosheskaya sportivnaya shkola No. 8, 2015.
- Beffa, Marie-Lise, and Roberte Hamayon. "Les langues mongoles." *Etudes mongoles et sibériennes* 14 (1983): 121–69.
- Belikov, Vasiliy V. *Evenki Buryatii: Istoriya i sovremennost'*. Ulan-Ude: BNTs SO RAN, 1994.
- Bichurin, Nikita Ya. (monastic name: Hyakinth [Iakinf]). *Denkwürdigkeiten über die Mongolei von dem Mönch Hyakinth*. Aus dem Russischen übersetzt von Karl Friedrich von der Borg. Berlin: Reimer, 1832.
- Birtalan, Ágnes. "Traditionelle mongolische Religionen im Wandel." In *Die ural-altaischen Völker: Identitäten im Wandel zwischen Tradition und Moderne. Vorträge des Symposiums der Societas Uralo-Altaica vom 13. bis 15. Oktober 2002*, edited by Gerson Klumpp und Michael Knüppel, 15–21. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003.
- . "Die Mythologie der mongolischen Volksreligion." In *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, edited by Egidius Schmalzriedt and Hans Wilhelm Haussig, Abteilung 1, Band 7, Teil 2, 877–1097. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004.
- Blanchard, Kendall. *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*, revised edition. Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1995.
- Blanchard, Kendall, and Alyce T. Cheska. *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*. South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey, 1985.
- Bogdanov, Yevgeniy S., and D. V. Kuznetsov. "Ordos Decorative Bronze Ware." *Archaeology, Ethnology and Anthropology of Eurasia* 6 (2001): 104–11.

- Bolonev, Firs F. "Vzaimovliyanie kul'tury russkogo i aborigennogo naseleniya Vostochnoy Sibiri." *Izvestiya sibirskogo otdeleniya akademii nauk SSSR, Seriya istoriya, filologiya i filosofiya* 14, 3 (1985): 37-43.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "Programme for the Sociology of Sport." In *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, edited by Pierre Bourdieu, 156–67. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Brasch, Rudolph. *How Did Sports Begin? A Look into the Origins of Man at Play*. London: Longman, 1972.
- Brehony, Kevin J. "Theories of Play." *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*. Advameg Inc., 2008. [www.faqs.org/childhood/Th-W/Theories-of-Play.html](http://www.faqs.org/childhood/Th-W/Theories-of-Play.html). Accessed February 9, 2014.
- Brentjes, Burchard. *Die orientalische Welt*. Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1970.
- . *Die Ahnen Dschingis-Chans*. Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1988.
- Brien, Kevin M. "Buddhism and Marxism: Ironic Affinities." *Dialogue and Universalism* 14, 1–2 (2004): 35–59.
- Bromber, Katrin, Birgit Krawietz, and Joseph Maguire. "Introduction: From Asian Sports to Sport in Asia." In *Sport Across Asia: Politics, Cultures, and Identities*, edited by Katrin Bromber, Birgit Krawietz, and Joseph Maguire, 1–10. Routledge: New York, 2013.
- Bromber, Katrin, Birgit Krawietz, and Petar Petrov. "Wrestling in Multifarious Modernity." *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, 4 (2014): 391–404.
- Brownell, Susan. "Thinking Dangerously: The Person and His Ideas." In *Body Cultures: Essays on Sport, Space, and Identity by Henning Eichberg*, edited by John Bale and Chris Philo, 22–44. London: Routledge, 1998.
- . "Why Should an Anthropologist Study Sports in China?" In *Games, Sports and Cultures*, edited by Noel Dyck, 43–63. Oxford: Berg, 2000.
- Budayev, B. Zh. "Slozheniye sistemy buryatskoy sportivnoy terminologii." In *Istoriya razvitiya mongol'skikh yazikov*, edited by Valentin I. Rassadin, 237–43. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs SO RAN, 1999.
- Buksikova, Ol'ga B. *Traditsionnyye igry buryat v kontse XIX – nachale XX vv. i opyt ikh transformatsii v natsional'noy khoreografii*. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'sko-poligraficheskiy kompleks VSGAKI, 2004.

- Bumboshkin, Vladislav M., Dmitriy G. Petrenko, and K. N. Saganov. "Razvitiye massovoy fizicheskoy kul'tury i sporta posredstvom ispol'zovaniya natsional'nykh fizicheskikh uprazhneniy, igr i vidov sporta." In *Sovremennyy olimpiyskiy i massovyy sport v kontekste 'vostok-zapad': Materialy III Mezhdunarodnoy nauchnoprakticheskoy konferentsii, g. Ulan-Ude, 7–10 sentyabrya 2005 g.*, edited by Aleksey V. Gas'kov, 12–14. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2005.
- Buytendijk, Frederik. *Wesen und Sinn des Spiels: Das Spielen des Menschen und der Tiere als Erscheinungsform der Lebenstriebte*. Berlin: Der Neue Geist, 1934.
- Caillois, Roger. "The Structure and Classification of Games." In *Sport, Culture and Society*, edited by John W. Loy and Gerald S. Kenyon, 44–55. London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969. First published in *Diogenes* 12 (1955): 62–75.
- . *Man, Play, and Games*. Translated from the French by Meyer Barash. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961. French original: *Le jeux et le hommes*. Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958.
- Calhoun, Donald W. *Sport, Culture, and Personality*. Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1987.
- Cashmore, Ellis. *Making Sense of Sports*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Castrén, M. Alexander. *M Alexander Castréns ethnologische Vorlesungen über die altaischen Völker nebst samojedischen Märchen und tatarischen Heldensagen*, edited by Anton Schiefner. St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1857.
- Chakars, Melissa. *The Scialist Way of Life in Siberia: Transformation in Buryatia*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014.
- Cheska, Alyce T. "The Study of Play from Five Anthropological Perspectives." In *Play: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Michael A. Salter, 17–35. West Point: Leisure Press, 1978.
- Chimitdorzhiev, Shirap B. *Buryat-Mongoly: istoriya i sovremennost'*. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2001.
- . *Khozhdeniye khori-buryat k Sagaan khamu (Belomu tsaryu): Ocherki po istorii i kul'ture khori-buryat. Srednevekov'e i novoye vremya*. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 2001.
- Coakley, Jay J. *Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1997.
- . *Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies*. 8<sup>th</sup> edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003.

- Crews, Robert. "Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia." *The American Historical Review* 108, 1 (2003): 50–83.
- Culin, Stewart. "Games." In *Handbook of American Indians: North of Mexico*, part 1, edited by Frederick Webb Hodge, 483–86. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907.
- Curtin, Jeremiah. *A Journey in Southern Siberia. The Mongols, their Religion and their Myths*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1909.
- Dabain, Bayaskhalan B., Valeriy M. Sydeyev, L. D. Tsybikova, and A. M. Tsaganov. *Moya Dzhida, dolina bogatyrskaya*. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2005.
- Damm, Hans. "Vom Wesen sog. Leibesübungen bei Naturvölkern. Ein Beitrag zur Genese des Sportes." *Studium Generale* 13, 1 (1960): 1–9.
- Danzanova, A. A. "Buddizm v Buryatii v 1920–30-e gody." In *Tezisi i doklady Mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-teoreticheskoy konferentsii "Banzarovskiy chteniya 2" posvyashchennoy 175-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya Dorzhi Banzarova*, edited by B. V. Banzarov, L. V. Kuras, and V. Ts. Naydakov, 90–93. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs, 1997.
- Darzha, Vyacheslav. *Loshchad' v traditsionnoy praktike tuvintsev-kochevnikov*. Kyzyl: TuvIKOPR SO RAN, 2003.
- Dashibalov, Bair B. *Archeologicheskiye pamyatniki kurykan i khori*. Ulan-Ude: BNTs SO RAN, 1995.
- . *Istoki: ot drevnikh khori-mongolov k buryatam. Ocherki*. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo nauchnogo tsentra SO RAN, 2003.
- . "Buryatiya v epokhu srednevekov'ya." In *Istoriya Buryatii s drevneyshikh vremen do nachala XX veka*, edited by Yefrem. Ye. Tarmakhanov, 46–73, Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009.
- Dashidondokov, Sh. S. "Narodnyye prazdniki aginskikh buryat." In *Baykal'skiye vstrechi – III: Kul'tury narodov Sibiri: Materialy III Mezhdunarodnogo nauchnogo simpoziuma*, vol. 1, edited by L. S. Dampilova, 281–87. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'sko-poligraficheskiy kompleks VSGAKI, 2001.
- Dashinorboyev, V. D., and B. D. Dashibal'zhirov. "O sokhranении traditsiy buryatskoy natsional'noy bor'by." In *Vozrozhdeniye traditsionnykh kul'tur narodov Buryatii: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii 14–15 maya 1998 g.*, 134–40. Ulan-Ude: Pravitel'stvo Respubliki Buryatiya, Rossiyskaya Akademiya nauk Sibirskoye otdeleniye, Baykal'skiy institut prirodopol'zovaniya, 1998.



- Dashiyeva, Nadezhda B. “K voprosu o traditsionnykh prazdnikakh v Buryatii.” In *Polevyye issledovaniya instituta etnografii 1980–1981*, edited by Sev’yan I. Vaynshteyn, 134–142. Moskva: Nauka, 1984.
- . “Traditsionnyye obshchestvennyye prazdniki buryat: opyt istoriko-etnograficheskogo issledovaniya.” Avtoreverat dissertatsii, Institut etnografii im. Miklukho-Maklaya AN SSSR. Moskva: Nauka, 1985.
- . *Buryatskiye taylagany (opyt istoriko-etnograficheskogo issledovaniya)*. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’sko-poligraficheskiy kompleks VSGAKI, 2001.
- . “Kalendar’ i kalendarnaya obryadnost’ Buryat.” Chapter 6 in *Buryaty*, edited by Lyubov’ L. Abayeva and Natal’ya L. Zhukosvskaya, 208–226. Moskva: Nauka, 2004.
- . “Kalendarnyye prazdniki buryat (konets XIX – nachalo XX vv.).” In *V mire traditsionnoy kul’tury Buryat*, edited by Tat’yana D. Skrynnikova, 96–151. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’svo BNTs SO RAN, 2007.
- Deshpande, S. H. *Physical Education in Ancient India*. Dehli: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1992.
- Diem, Carl. *Asiatische Reiterspiele: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte der Völker*. Berlin: Deutscher Archiv-Verlag, 1941.
- Dogdome, B. D. “O perezhitkakh lamaizma v Aginskom natsional’nom okruge i opyte ateisticheskoy raboty organizatsii obshchestva “Znaniye” sredi naseleniya.” In *Voprosy preodoleniya perezhitkov lamaizma, shamanizma i staroobryadchestva*, edited by A. A. Belousov, 138–41. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel’svo, 1971.
- Dolgikh, Boris O. “Nekotorye dannye k istorii obrazovaniya buryatskogo naroda.” *Sovetskaya etnografiya* 1 (1953): 38–63.
- Dondukov, U.-Zh. Sh., and B.-N. Tsyrenov. “Bay”. In *Etnograficheskiy sbornik*, issue 1, edited by Kseniya M. Gerasimova and Iosif Ye. Tugutov, 130–32. Ulan-Ude: 1960.
- Dorzhiyev, Badma Sh. *Istoriya Zakamny: populyarnyy istoricheskiy ocherk*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’svo BNTs SO RAN, 1997.
- . *Buryatiya epokhi novogo vremeni (Ocherki)*. Ulan-Ude: 2011.
- Dorzhiyeva, S. P. “Strel’ba iz luka kak sotsiokul’turnyy fenomen buryatskoy kul’tury.” In *Fenomenologiya traditsionnosti i sovremennosti*, edited by Lyubov’ L. Abayeva, 141–48. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’svo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2001.
- Droulias, Andreas. Untitled “Comprehensive Paper.” Unpublished manuscript finished in 2010.

- Dugarova, Radzhana D. "Raznovidnosti traditsionnoy sportivnoy strel'by iz luka u buryat." In *Aktual'nyye problem buryatskogo yazyka, literatury, istorii*, edited by Ye. K. Sharakhshinova, 66–68. Irkutsk: 2000.
- . "Traditsionnyye sportivnyye sostyazaniya 'eryn gurban naadan' ('tri igry muzhey') v folklоре buryat." In *Baykal'skiye vstrechi – III: Kul'tury narodov Sibiri: Materialy III Mezhdunarodnogo nauchnogo simpoziuma*, vol. 1, edited by L. S. Dampilova, 163–69. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'sko-poligraficheskiy kompleks VSGAKI, 2001.
- . "Semantika traditsionnogo buryatskogo sostyazaniya v strel'be iz luka 'bay kharbaan'." In *Mir Tsentral'noy Azii*, vol. 3, *Kul'turologiya. Filosofiya. Istochnikovedeniye*, edited by B. V. Bazarov, 31–38. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs SO RAN, 2002.
- . "Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik 'Eryn gurban naadan' ('Tri igrishcha muzhey') i ego mesto v kul'ture Buryat." Dissertatsiya na soiskaniye uchenoy stepeni kandidata istoricheskikh nauk, Buryatskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet. Ulan-Ude: 2004.
- . "Traditsionnyy sportivnyy prazdnik 'Eryn gurban naadam' ('Tri igrishcha muzhey') i ego mesto v kul'ture Buryat." Avtoreferat dissertatsii. Moskva: 2004.
- Dyck, Noel. "Introduction." In *Games, Sports and Cultures*, edited by Noel Dyck, 1–9. Oxford: Berg, 2000.
- . "Games, Bodies, Celebrations and Boundaries: Anthropological Perspectives on Sport." In *Games, Sports and Cultures*, edited by Noel Dyck, 13–42. Oxford: Berg, 2000.
- Eichberg, Henning. *Der Weg des Sports in die industrielle Zivilisation*. Baden-Baden: Nomos-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1973.
- . *Leistung, Spannung, Geschwindigkeit: Sport und Tanz im gesellschaftlichen Wandel des 18./19. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978.
- . "The Enclosure of the Body. The Historical Relativity of 'Health', 'Nature' and the Environment of Sport." In *Body Cultures: Essays on Sport, Space, and Identity by Henning Eichberg*, edited by John Bale and Chris Philo, 47–67. London: Routledge, 1998. Originally published in *Journal of Contemporary History* 21 (1986): 99–121.
- . "A Revolution of Body Culture? Traditional Games on the Way from Modernization to 'Postmodernity'." In *Body Cultures: Essays on Sport, Space, and Identity by Henning Eichberg*, edited by John Bale and Chris Philo, 128–48. London: Routledge, 1998. Originally published in *Eclipse et Renaissance des Jeux Populaires*, ed. J.-J. Barreau and G. Jaouen (Rennes 1991).

- . “Alte Spiele—Neue Feste.” In *Neue Sportkultur. Von der Alternativen Bewegungskultur zur Neuen Sportkultur. Neue Wege in Sport, Spiel, Tanz und Theater—ein Handbuch*, edited by Rainer Pawelke, 165–81. Lichtenau: AOL-Verlag, 1995.
- . “Olympische und andere Bewegungskulturen—Über Exklusion, Anerkennung und Fest.” In *Sport bewegt Europa. Beiträge zur interkulturellen Verständigung*, edited by Diethelm Blecking and Petra Gieß-Stüber, 93–115. Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag Hohengehren, 2006.
- . “The Nation in Movement—Turning the Theory of the People down on the Feet.” Keynote for the International Conference on Social Science in Sport, 8<sup>th</sup> ISHPES Seminar, 24–27 August 2006, in Ljubljana, Slovenia: “Sport, Nation, Nationalism.” [www.isdy.net/pdf/eng/2006\\_14.pdf](http://www.isdy.net/pdf/eng/2006_14.pdf). Accessed May 8, 2014.
- Eichberg, Henning, and Ali Yehia El Mansouri. “Sport in Lybia: Physical Culture as an Indicator of Social Contradictions.” In *Body Cultures: Essays on Sport, Space, and Identity by Henning Eichberg*, edited by John Bale and Chris Philo, 87–99. London: Routledge, 1998. Originally published in *Geschichte der Leibesübungen*, ed. Horst Ueberhorst (Berlin: Bartels & Wernitz, 1989).
- Eliade, Mircea. *Schamanismus und archaische Ekstasetechnik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975. The French original, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l’extase*, was published in Paris in 1951.
- Elias, Norbert. *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation: soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*, zweite um eine Einleitung vermehrte Auflage. Bern: Francke, 1969. First English edition: Elias, Norbert. *The civilizing process*, translated by Edmund Jephcott. New York: Urizen Books, 1978.
- . “Die Genese des Sports als soziologisches Problem.” In *Texte zur Soziologie des Sports. Sammlung fremdsprachiger Beiträge*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, edited by Kurt Hammerich and Klaus Heinemann, 81–109. Schorndorf: Hofmann, 1979.
- En, Wu. “On the Origin of Bronze Belt Plaques of Ancient Nomads in Northern China.” *Chinese Archaeology* 3 (2003): 186–92.
- Erasmus, Charles J. “Patolli, Pachisi, and the Limitation of Possibilities.” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 6 (1950): 369–87.
- Erdynyeva, Mariya O., and Boris A. Chernov. *Geografiya Buryatii*. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel’stvo, 1994.
- Erdyniyev, Dashi-Nima R. “Nuzhny li takiye pravila?” In *Pervyy mergen Buryatii*, edited by S. D. Ochirov, 44–46. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’skiy dom “Buryaad unen”, 2005.

- . “Izgotovleniya buryat-mongol’skogo luka.” In *Pervyy mergen Buryatii*, edited by S. D. Ochirov, 47–49. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’skiy dom “Buryaad unen”, 2005.
- Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society*. New York: Norton, 1950.
- Fang, Zhuang-You. “Xianbei Yuyan Kao [The Exploration of the Hsien-Pi Language].” *Yanjing Xuebao [Yanjing Journal]* 8 (1930): 1429–68.
- Firth, Raymond. “A Dart Match in Tikopia: A Study in the Sociology of Primitive Sport.” *Oceania* 1, 1 (1930): 64–96.
- Flitner, Andreas. “Johan Huizingas Homo ludens.” In *Homo Ludens—Der spielende Mensch*, vol. 1, edited by Günther G. Bauer, 19–24. München: Musikverlag Emil Katzibichler, 1991.
- Fomin, Vladimir A. *Ocherki istorii fizicheskoy kul’tury v Buryatii*. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2003.
- . “Istoricheskiye korni buryatskogo troyebor’ya.” In *Istoriko-kul’turnoye i sportivno-prikladnoye razvitiye natsional’nykh vidov sporta v Rossii: opyt regionov: materialy Vserossiyskoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, edited by M. D. Gulyayev, 296–99. Yakutsk: FGOU VPO “ChGIFKiS”, 2009.
- . “Narodnyye vidy sporta buryat—strel’ba iz luka i konnyye skachki.” In *Razvitiye sporta vysshikh dostizheniy i fizkul’turnogo obrazovaniya v regionakh RF: istoriya, traditsiya, innovatsiya: materialy Vserossiyskoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, edited by R. I. Platonova, 384–89. Yakutsk: Izdatel’stvo YaNTs SO RAN, 2009.
- . “Pervyye chempiony bukhe barilda iz Ust’-Ordynskogo okruga.” Unpublished manuscript.
- Fomin, Vladimir A., Bayaskhlan Dabain, and German Namzhilov. *Zolotaya kolybel’ chempionov*. Ulan-Ude: Baikal-Geo, 2011.
- Fomin, Vladimir A., and L. S. Khandazhapov. “Problemy vozrozhdeniya natsional’nykh vidov sporta Buryat.” In *V Mezhdunarodnyy kongress “Chelovek, sport, zdorov’e”, 21–23 aprelya, g. Sankt-Peterburg, Rossiya: materialy kongressa*, edited by V. A. Taymazov, 174–75. Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel’stvo “Olimp-Sankt-Peterburg”, 2011.
- Fomin, Vladimir A., and Semën V. Manturov. *Vekovoy put’ fizicheskoy kul’tury i sporta v Buryatii*. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’stvo BNTs SO RAN, 2002.

- Fomin, Vladimir A., G. N. Petrenko, and A. I. Antropov. "Sportivnyye forumy sel'skoy molodëzhi Buryatii i Irkutskoy oblasti." In *Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost', perspektivy: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, edited by Semën V. Manturov, 40–43. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998.
- Fomin, Vladimir A., and Vadim V. Shokhirev. "Osnovnye etapy stanovleniya bukhe barildaan." In *Sovremennyy olimpiyskiy i massovyy sport v kontekste 'vostok-zapad': Materialy III Mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii, g. Ulan-Ude, 7–10 sentyabrya 2005 g.*, edited by Aleksey V. Gas'kov, 135–36. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2005.
- . *Istoriya fizicheskoy kul'tury i sporta Buryatii do 1917 goda*. Irkutsk: Izdatel'stvo "Megaprint", 2011.
- . "Narodnaya sistema fizicheskogo vospitaniya u buryat." In *Istoriko-kul'turnoye i sportivno-prikladnoye razvitiye natsional'nykh vidov sporta v Rossii: opyt regionov: materialy Vserossiyskoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, edited by M. D. Gulyayev, 287–91. Yakutsk: FGOU VPO "ChGIFKiS", 2009.
- Fomin, Vladimir A., and Valeriy A. Strel'nikov. "Ot samobytnykh igr k olimpiyskim medalyam." In *Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost', perspektivy: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, edited by Semën V. Manturov, 45–49. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998.
- Forsyth, James. *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony 1581–1990*. Cambridge: University Press, 1992.
- Frazer, James G. *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 1. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1935.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Translated by C. J. M. Hubback. London: The International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1922. The German original "*Jenseits des Lustprinzips*" was first published 1920.
- Fritz, Andrea. "Ansatz und Deutung des Spiels in der Ethnologie." MA thesis, Universität Wien, 1985.
- Gadlo, Aleksandr V. *Etnografiya narodov Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka*. Leningrad: 1987.
- Geertz, Clifford. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, 412–53. New York: Basic Books, 1973. Originally published in *Daedalus* 101 (1972): 1–37.
- Georgi, Johann Gottlieb. *Bemerkungen einer Reise im Rußischen Reich im Jahre 1772*. Erster Band. Sankt Petersburg: gedruckt bey der Kayserl. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1775.

- . *Beschreibung aller Nationen des Rußischen Reichs, ihrer Lebensart, Religion, Gebräuche, Wohnungen, Kleidungen und übrigen Merkwürdigkeiten*. Vierte und letzte Ausgabe. Mongolische Völker, Russen und die noch übrigen Nationen. St. Petersburg: Carl Wilhelm Müller, 1780.
- Gerasimova, Kseniya M., Galina R. Galdanova, and Galina N. Ochirova. *Traditsionnaya kul'tura buryat*. Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2000.
- Girchenko, Vladimir P. "Buryaty i tungusy v Pribaykal'ye." *Pribaykal'skiy kalendar' na 1922 g.* (1921): 99–106.
- Gmelin, Johann Georg. *Reise durch Sibirien von dem Jahr 1733 bis 1743*. Erster Theil. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1751.
- . *Reise durch Sibirien von dem Jahr 1733 bis 1743*. Zweyter Theil. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1752.
- Gombozhapova, Khanda-Tsyren D. "Istoriya izobreteniya, izgotovleniya i konstruktsiya luka." In *Istoriko-kul'turnoye i sportivno-prikladnoye razvitiye natsional'nykh vidov sporta v Rossii: opyt regionov: materialy Vserossiyskoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, edited by M. D. Gulyayev, 63–66. Yakutsk: FGOU VPO "ChGIFKiS", 2009.
- Gombozhapova, Khanda-Tsyren D., and Stepan V. Kalmykov. *Strel'ba iz luka: istoriya i sovremennost'*. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2009.
- Gorbunov, V. "Zveni tetival!" In *Natsional'nyye vidy sporta*, edited by A. N. Piskarev, 41–49. Moskva: Sovremennaya Rossiya, 1976.
- Govorkov, M. "True to Age-Old Traditions." In *National Folk Sports in the USSR*, edited by Yuri Lukashin, 75–88. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980.
- Greenwood, Susan. *The Anthropology of Magic*. London: Bloomsbury, 2009.
- Groos, Karl. *Die Spiele der Tiere*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1907.
- . *Das Spiel: Zwei Vorträge*. Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1922.
- Gurulyev, Stanislav A. *Chto v imeni tvoyem, Baykal?* Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1991.
- Guttmann, Allen. *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.
- Hamayon, Roberte N. "Shamanism in Siberia: From Partnership in Supernature to Counter-power in Society." In *Shamanism, History, and the State*, edited by Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey, 76–89. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994.

- . “Tricks of the Trade or How Siberian Hunters Play the Game of Life-Exchange.” Chapter 8 in *Expanding the Economic Concept of Exchange: Deception, Self-Deception and Illusions*, edited by Caroline Gerschlager, 133–47. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001.
- . “Emblem of Minority, Substitute for Sovereignty: The Case of Buryatia.” *Diogenes* 194, 49/2 (2002): 16–21.
- . “Game and Games, Fortune and Dualism in Siberian Shamanism.” In *Shamanism: A Reader*, edited by Graham Harvey, 63–68. London: Routledge, 2003.
- . “Construction of a National Emblem, Recomposition of Identities and ‘Heroic’ Millenarianism in post-Soviet Buryatia: A Reappraisal.” In *Circumpolar Ethnicity and Identity*, edited by Takashi Irimoto and Takako Yamada, *Senri Ethnological Studies* 66 (2004): 293–305.
- . “A Challenging Technique Involving Imaginary Figures of Power among the Pre-Soviet West-Buryats.” Chapter 1 in *States of Mind: Power, Place and the Subject in Inner Asia*, edited by David Sneath, 15–46. Bellingham: Western Washington University Press, 2006.
- . *Jouer. Étude anthropologique à partir d'exemples sibériens*. Paris: La Découverte, 2012.
- Handelman, Don. “A Note on Play.” *American Anthropologist* 76, 1 (1974): 66–68.
- Hargreaves, John. “Sport, Culture and Ideology.” In *Sport, Culture and Ideology*, edited by Jennifer Hargreaves, 30–61. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.
- Harms, Volker. “Der Terminus „Spiel“ in der Ethnologie.” PhD dissertation, Universität zu Göttingen. Hamburg: Renner, 1969.
- Harris, Janet C., and Roberta J. Park. “Introduction to the Sociocultural Study of Play, Games, and Sports.” In *Play, Games and Sports in Cultural Contexts*, edited by Janet C. Harris and Roberta J. Park, 1–36. Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1983.
- Heissig, Walther. *Der mongolische Kulturwandel in den Hsingan-Provinzen Mandschukuos*. Wien: Exner, 1944.

- Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens: vom Ursprung der Kultur im Spiel*. Translated (from the Dutch into German) by H. Nachod. Hamburg: Rowolth, 1956. Original Dutch edition: *Homo Ludens: Proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der Cultuur* (Haarlem, The Netherlands: H.D. Tjeenk Willink, 1938); first German edition: *Homo ludens: Versuch einer Bestimmung des Spielelements der Kultur* (Amsterdam: Akademische Verlagsanstalt Pantheon, 1939); first English edition: *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949).
- Humphrey, Caroline. "The Uses of Genealogy: A Historical Study of the Nomadic and Sedentarised Buryat." In *Pastoral Production and Society: Proceedings of the International Meeting on Nomadic Pastoralism / Production pastorale et société: actes du colloque international sur le pastoralisme nomade, Paris 1–3 Déc. 1976*, 235–60. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- . *Karl Marx Collective: Economy, Society and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- . "Population Trends, Ethnicity and Religion among the Buryats." In *The Development of Siberia: People and Resources*, edited by Alan Wood, 147–76. Basingstoke: Mac Millan, 1989.
- . "Buryats." In *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union*, edited by Graham Smith, 290–302. London: Longman, 1990.
- . "Rural Institutions." Chapter 3 in *The End of Nomadism? Society, State and the Environment in Inner Asia*, edited by Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath, 68–135. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Hundley, Helen S. "Defending the Periphery: Tsarist Management of Buriat Buddhism." *The Russian Review* 69 (2010): 231–50.
- Jensen, Adolf E. "Wettkampf-Parteien, Zweiklassen-Systeme und geographische Orientierung." *Studium Generale* 1, 1 (1947): 38–47.
- Jünger, Friedrich Georg. *Die Spiele: Ein Schlüssel zu ihrer Deutung*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1953.
- Kabzińska-Stawarz, Iwona. "Game as a Communication. Symbolical-Magical Function of Games in Mongolia." *Ethnologia Polona* 9 (1983): 135–47.
- . "Eriin Gurvan Naadam—'Three Games of the Men in Mongolia'." *Ethnologia Polona* 13 (1987): 45–89.
- . *Games of Mongolian Shepherds*. Warsaw: 1991.



- Kamphausen, Hans. "Traditionelle Leibesübungen bei autochthonen Völkern: Ein problemorientierter Überblick." In *Geschichte der Leibesübungen*, edited by Horst Ueberhorst, vol. 1, 64–109. Berlin: Bartels- und Wernitz-Verlag, 1972.
- Karavayev, V. "Strely nad stadionom." In *Natsional'nyye igry*, 12–17. Moskva: Sovremennaya Rossiya, 1963.
- Karlsrud, Knut. "Physical Activity, Activity for Life, in Soviet Caucasus. A Sport-Anthropological Study in the Soviet Caucasus." In *Sport, Culture, Society: International, Historical, and Sociological Perspectives: Proceedings of the VIII Commonwealth and International Conference on Sport, Physical Education, Dance, Recreation, and Health: Conference '86 Glasgow, 18–23 July*, edited by J. A. Mangan, and R. B. Small, 99–107. London: Spon, 1986.
- Khamarkhanov, A. Z. "O kul'ture i byte mongol'skikh narodov v trude N. Vitsena "Severnaya i Vostochnaya Tartariya"." In *Kul'turno-bytovyye traditsii buryat i mongolov*, 143–61. Ulan-Ude: Institut obshchestvennykh nauk SO AN SSSR, 1988.
- Khangalov, Matvey N. "Natsional'nyy prazdnik u buryat." *Izvestiya Vostochno-Sibirskogo otdela Russkogo Geograficheskogo obshchestva* 11, 3–4 (1880): 30–34.
- . "Zegete-aba—oblava na zverey u drevnikh buryat." In Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1, 15–33. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004. First published in *Izvestiya Vostochno-Sibirskogo otdela Russkogo Geograficheskogo obshchestva* 19, 3 (1888): 1–26.
- . "Novyye materialy o shamanstve u buryat." In Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1, 333–441. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004. First published in *Zapiski Vostochno-Sibirskogo otdela Russkogo Geograficheskogo obshchestva po etnografii* 2, 1 (1890).
- . "Neskol'ko dannyykh dlya kharakteristiki byta severnykh Buryat." In Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1, 169–85. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004. First published in *Etnograficheskoye obozreniye* 10, 3 (1891): 144–65.
- . "Yurisdicheskiye obychai u buryat." In Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1, 135–68. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004. First published in *Etnograficheskoye obozreniye* 21, 2 (1894): 100–143.
- . "Dukhi-lyudoyedy u Buryat." In Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 2, 164–72. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004. First published in *Etnograficheskoye obozreniye* 1 (1896): 129–37.

- . “Mu-shubun.” In Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 3, 25–26. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004. First published in Matvey N. Khangalov, *Balaganskiy sbornik. Skazki, pover'ya i nekotoryye obryady u severnykh buryat*, vol. 5 of *Trudy Vostochno-Sibirskago otdela Russkago Geograficheskago obshchestva*, edited by G. N. Potanin. Tomsk: 1903.
- . “Moi predki.” In Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1, 109–32. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004.
- . “Svadebnyye obryady u buryat.” In Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1, 208–25. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004.
- Khangalov, Matvey N., and Nikolay N. Agapitov. “Materialy dlya izucheniya shamanstva v Sibiri. Shamanstvo u buryat Irkutskoy gubernii.” In Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1, 236–441. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004. First published in *Izvestiya Vostochno-Sibirskago otdela Russkago Geograficheskago obshchestva* 14, 1–2 (1883): 1–61.
- Kharitonov, Mikhail A. “Traditsiya oblavnykh okhot v kul'ture buryat (K postanovke problem).” In *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 3, edited by Yefgeniy M. Yegorov et al., 5–16. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2001.
- Khudyakov, Yuliy S. “Evolutsiya slozhnopostavnogo luka u kochevnikov Tsentral'noy Azii.” In *Voyennoye delo naseleniya yuga Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka*, edited by V. E. Medvedev and Yuliy S. Khudyakov, 107–48. Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1993.
- Kilmer, Scott. “Sport as Ritual: A Theoretical Approach.” In *The Study of Play: Problems and Prospects*, edited by David F. Lancy and Allan Tindall, 44–49. West Point: Leisure Press, 1977.
- Klein, Alan. *Sugarball: the American Game, the Dominican Dream*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.
- Kleine Enzyklopädie Körperkultur und Sport*, fünfte, neu bearbeitet Auflage, edited by Günter Erbach et al. Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut VEB, 1979.
- Klementz [Klements], Demetrius [Dmitriy]. “Buriats.” In *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, edited by James Hastings, vol. 3, 1–17. Edinburgh: Clark, 1910.

- Klements, Dmitriy A., and Matvey N. Khangalov. "Obshchestvennyye okhoty u severnykh buryat (Zegete aba – okhota na rosomakh)." In Matvey N. Khangalov, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Georgiy N. Rumyantsev, vol. 1, 34–86. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2004. First published in *Materialy po etnografii Rossii*, vol. 1, edited by F. K. Volkov, 117–54. Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Etnograficheskogo otdela Russkogo muzeya, 1910.
- Klemm, M. "Beitrag zur Volkskunde der Burjato-Mongolei." *Baessler Archiv: Beiträge zur Völkerkunde* 18, 3 (1935): 99–129.
- Klopsteg, Paul E. "Physics of Bows and Arrows." *American Journal of Physics* 11, 4 (August 1943): 175–92.
- Kolarz, Walter. *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, New York: Praeger, 1954.
- Kopylov, V. "Taylagany, ili obshchestvennyye zhertvoprinozheniya u severo-baykal'skikh Buryat." *Irkutskiyeparkhial'nyye vedomosti* 12 (1886), supplement: 142–64.
- Kovacs, Attila-Endre. "National Tradition: The Mongolian Wrestling." In *Problemy traditsionnoy kul'tury narodov baykal'skogo regiona: Materialy mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii (2–3 iyulya 1999 g.)*, edited by Boris V. Banzarov, 46. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs SO RAN, 1999.
- Koz'min, N. N. "Mikhail Nikolayevich Bogdanov." In Mikhail N. Bogdanov, *Ocherki istorii buryat-mongol'skogo naroda*, edited by N. N. Koz'min, 244–57. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2014.
- Körbs, Werner. "Kultische Wurzel und frühe Entwicklung des Sports." *Studium Generale* 13, 1 (1960): 11–21.
- Krader, Lawrence. "Buryat Religion and Society." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 10, 3 (1954): 322–51.
- Krech, Shepard, III. "Ethnohistory." In *The Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, edited by David Levinson and Melvin Ember. Vol. 2, 422–429. London: Macmillan, 1996.
- Krist, Stefan. "Where Going Back is a Step Forward: The Re-Traditionalising of Sport Games in Post-Soviet Buriatia." *Sibirica* 4, 1 (2004): 104–15.
- . "Kickboxing, Breakdance and Pop Music versus Wrestling, Round Dance and Folk Music?" *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 41 (2009): 131–42.
- . "Wrestling Magic: National Wrestling in Buryatia, Mongolia and Tuva in the Past and Today." *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, 4 (2014): 423–44.

- Krist, Stefan, and Alena Kabunova. "O buryatskom sportivnom prazdnike Surkharbaan kak syuzhete izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva." In *Buryaty v kontekste sovremennykh etnokul'turnykh i etnosotsial'nykh protsessov. Traditsionnaya kul'tura, narodnoye iskusstvo i natsionaln'yye vidy sporta buryat v usloviyakh polietnichnosti*, vol. 1, 381–394. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'sko-poligraficheskiy kompleks FGOU VPO VSGAKI, 2006.
- Kroeber, Alfred L. *Anthropology: Race, Language, Culture, Psychology, Pre-History*. New York: Harcourt, 1948.
- Kropotkin, Peter. *Gegenseitige Hilfe in der Entwicklung*. Leipzig: Thomas, 1904.
- Kudrjanzew, F. A., and Chomchelow, B. Ch. "Geschichtlicher Abriss." Part 5 of chapter "Burjat-Mongolische ASSR" in *Große Sowjet-Enzyklopädie: Reihe Länder der Erde*, vol. 19, 111–37. Berlin: Verlag Kultur und Fortschritt, 1955.
- Kulakov, Pëtr E., and I. A. Molodykh. *Illyustrirovannoye opisaniye byta sel'skago naseleniya Irkutskoy gubernii*. Sankt-Peterburg: 1896.
- Kummels, Ingrid. "Anthropological Perspectives on Sport and Culture: Against Sports as the Essence of Western Modernity." In *Sport Across Asia: Politics, Cultures, and Identities*, edited by Katrin Bromber, Birgit Krawietz and Joseph Maguire, 11–31. Routledge: New York, 2013.
- Kührer, Robert H. "Das menschliche Spiel—seine Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten." PhD diss., Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, 1979.
- Lacaze, Gaele. "Representations and Techniques of the Body among the Mongols." *Inner Asia* 5, 1 (2003): 53–64.
- Lang, M.-Katharina, and Stefan Krist. "Surharban Depicted: An Analytical Double View." In *Altaica Budapestinensia MMII—Proceedings of the 45<sup>th</sup> Permanent International Altaistic Conference (PIAC) Budapest, Hungary, June 23–28, 2002*, edited by Alice Sárközi and Attila Rákos, 199–210. Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2003.
- Lattimore, Owen. "Minorities in the Soviet Far East." *Far Eastern Survey* 13, 17 (1944): 156–58.
- Lavenda, Robert H. "Play." In *The Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, edited by David Levinson and Melvin Ember, vol. 3, 936–40. London: Macmillan, 1996.
- Leisse, Olaf, and Utta-Kristin Leisse. "A Siberian Challenge: Dealing with Multiethnicity in the Republic of Buryatia." *Nationalities Papers* 35, 4 (2007): 773–88.

- Leonov, A. M. “Kogda nachalos’ massovoye pereseleniye staroobryadtsev v Zabaykal’ye?” In *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 2, edited by N. V. Kim, 20–21, Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1991.
- Lever, Janet. *Soccer Madness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966. Original French publication: *La pensée sauvage*. Paris: Plon, 1962.
- Linkhovoin, Lodon. *Zametki o dorevolutsionnom byte aginskikh buryat*. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel’stvo, 1972.
- . *Lodon bagshin debterhee*. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’stvo “Buryaad-mongol nom”, 2012.
- Lkhagvasuren, G. “Fisicheskaya kul’tura v traditsiyakh gosudarstvennoy politiki Mongolii.” In *Fizicheskaya kul’tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost’, perspektivy: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, edited by Semën V. Manturov, 14–17. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998.
- Loginovskiy, Karp D. “Igry buryat Vostochnago Zabaykal’ya.” *Zapiski chitinskago otdeleniya priamurskago otdela imperatorskago russkago geograficheskago obshchestva* 2 (1897): 45–56.
- Loy, John W. “The Nature of Sport: A Definitional Effort.” In *Sport, Culture and Society*, edited by John W. Loy and Gerald S. Kenyon, 56–69. London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969.
- Loy, John W., and Gerald S. Kenyon. “The Sociology of Sport: An Emerging Field.” In *Sport, Culture and Society*, edited by John W. Loy and Gerald S. Kenyon, 1–12. London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969.
- Lőrincz, László. “Die mongolische Mythologie.” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 27, 1 (1973): 103–26.
- Lukas, Gerhard. *Die Körperkultur in frühen Epochen der Menschheitsentwicklung*. Berlin: Sportverlag, 1969.
- Luschan, Felix von. “Zusammengesetzte und verstärkte Bogen.” *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 31 (1899): 221–39.
- Lüschen, Günther. “Prolegomena zu einer Soziologie des Sports.” *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 12 (1960): 505–15.
- MacAloon, John, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. “Deep Play and the Flow Experience in Rock Climbing.” In *Play, Games and Sports in Cultural Contexts*, edited by Janet C. Harris and Roberta J. Park, 361–84. Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1983.

- MacClancy, Jeremy. "Sport, Identity and Ethnicity." In *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity*, edited by Jeremy MacClancy, 1–22. Oxford: Berg, 1996.
- Magdalinski, Tara, and Timothy J. L. Chandler. "With God on their Side: An Introduction." In *With God on their Side: Sport in the Service of Religion*, edited by Tara Magdalinski and Timothy J. L. Chandler, 1–20. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Makhachkeyev, Aleksandr V., and Tamara M. Naguslayeva. *Bukhe barildaan. Osobennosti buryatskoy natsional'noy bor'by*. Ulan-Ude: NovaPrint, 2011.
- Maksanov, S. A. "Kakov byl uroven' kul'tury naseleniya Buryatii do Oktyabr'skoy Sotsialisticheskoy revolyutsii? *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 2, edited by N. V. Kim, 58–61. Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1991.
- Manturov, Semën V., Vladimir A. Fomin, and Valeriy A. Strel'nikov. "Sportivnaya letopis' Respubliki Buryatiya." In *Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost', perspektivy: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, edited by Semën V. Manturov, 5–14. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998.
- Manushkina, Yelena G. *Svadebnyye obryady zapadnykh buryat v kontse XIX – nachele XX veka*. Irkutsk: Izdatel'stvo IP "Makarov S. Ye.", 2001.
- Mathys, Fritz Karl. *Kultische Ursprünge des Sports*. Celle: Pohl, 1958.
- Matkhanova, Emiliya I. *Bytovye traditsii v sovremennykh usloviyakh*. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1965.
- Mauss, Marcel. "Techniques of the Body." In *Incorporations* (vol. 6 of *Zone*), edited by Jonathan Cary and Sanford Kwinter. New York: Zone, 1992. 455–77. Originally published in French under the title "Les techniques du corps" in *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique* 32 (1935): 271–93.
- Mayny, Sh. B. "Ritual'nyy 'tanets orla' u tuvintsev." In *Aktual'nyye problemy issledovaniya etnoekologicheskikh i etnnokul'turnykh traditsiy narodov Sayano-Altaya. Materialy I-oy mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii molodykh uchenykh, aspirantov i studentov*, 184–87. Kyzyl: Ministerstvo obrazovaniya i nauki Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Ministerstvo obrazovaniya i nauki Respubliki Tyva, Ministerstvo po delam molodëzhi i sporta Respubliki Tyva, FGBOU VPO "Tuvinskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet", 2012.
- Mead, George H. *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

- Mead, Margaret. *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Study of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Societies*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1928.
- . “A Choktaw Ball Game.” In *Primitive Heritage: An Anthropological Anthology*, edited by Margaret Mead and Nicolas Calas, 289–95. New York: Random House, 1953.
- Mikhaylov, Taras M. “Ob obykhakh i traditsiyakh buryat v sovremennyy period.” In *Kul'tura i byt narodov Buryatii*. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1965.
- . “Shamanskiye perezhitki i nekotoryye voprosy byta i kul'tury narodov Sibiri.” In *Voprosy preodoleniya perezhitkov lamaizma, shamanizma i staroobryadchestva*, edited by A. A. Belousov, 56–68. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1971.
- . “Kakova istoriya Buryatii v period mongol'skogo vladichestva (XII–XVI vv.)?” In *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 1, edited by Taras M. Mikhaylov, 49–56. Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1990.
- . “Buryaty.” In *Narody Rossii: entsiklopediya*, edited by Valeriy A. Tishkov, 118–22. Moskva: Nauchnoye izdatel'stvo “Bol'shaya Rossiyskaya Entsiklopediya”, 1994.
- Mikhaylov, V. “Zametka po povodu perevoda vyrazheniya ‘zegete aba’—okhota na rossomakh v stat'e M. N. Khangelova i D. A. Klementsа ‘Obshchestvennyye okhoty u severnykh buryat’.” *Zhivaya starina* 1–2 (1913): 181–82.
- Mikhaylov, Viktor A. *Oruzhiye i dospekhi buryat*. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo ONTs “Sibir”, 1993.
- . *Traditsionnyye promysly buryat: okhota, rybolovstvo (XVII – nachalo XX veka)*. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2006.
- Miller, David L. *Gods and Games: Toward a Theology of Play*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- Miracle, Andrew W. “Sports.” In *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, edited by David Levinson and Melvin Ember, vol. 4, 1248–52. New York: Macmillan, 1996.
- Mitypov, Vladimir G. “Taynaya chast' khorinskoy missii (versiya).” In *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 4, edited by V. M. Alekseyeva et al., 31–38. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2003.
- Mitypov, M. B., F. M. Darkhanov, and M. I. Shalakhov. “Razvitiye detsko-yunosheskikh sportivnykh shkol v Respublike Buryatiya.” In *Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost', perspektivy: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, edited by Semën V. Manturov, 26–28. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998.

- Montgomery, Robert W. *Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Nationality and Cultural Policy: The Buryats and their Language*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005.
- Mooney, James. "The Cherokee Ball Play." *The American Anthropologist* 3, 2 (1890): 105–32.
- . "Amusements." In *Handbook of American Indians: North of Mexico*, part 1, edited by Frederick Webb Hodge, 50–51. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907.
- Morokhoyeva, Zoya P. *Lichnost' v kul'turakh vostoka i zapada: K postanovke problemy*. Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1994.
- Morris, Desmond. *The Soccer Tribe*. London: Cape, 1981.
- Morse, Edward S. *Ancient and Modern Methods of Arrow-Release*. Salem: 1885.
- . *Additional Notes on Arrow Release*. Salem: Peabody Museum, 1922.
- Morton, Henry W. "Soviet Sport in the 1960's." In *Sport, Culture and Society*, edited by John W. Loy and Gerald S. Kenyon, 192–202. London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969.
- . "Sport in Soviet Russia." In *Sport and Society*, edited by John T. Talamini and Charles H. Page, 112–28. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973.
- Mostaert, Antoine, and Frances Wang. "Social Values and Patterns of Living." In *A Regional Handbook on the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region*, compiled by the Far Eastern and Russian Institute, University of Washington, Seattle, 183–220. New Haven: Human Relations Area Files 60, 1956.
- Munayev, L. A., ed. *Respublika Buryatiya—75 let: statisticheskiy sbornik (yubileynyy vypusk)*. Ulan-Ude: Gosudarstvennyi komitet po statistike Respubliki Buryatiya, 1998.
- Murphy, Robert F. *Cultural and Social Anthropology: An Ouverture*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1989.
- Musch, Tilman. *Nomadismus und Sesshaftigkeit bei den Burjaten: Gesellschaftlicher Wandel im Spiegel zeitgenössischer Folklore*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2006.
- Myasnikov, Vadim Yu. "Voyennoye delo buryat v XVII–XVIII vv." In *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 4, edited by V. M. Alekseyeva et al., 108–17. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2003.
- Myasnikov, Vadim Yu., and Vladimir D. Dugarov. *Voyennoye delo kochevnikov baykal'skogo regiona v period srednevekov'ya*. Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2004.



- Nadezhdin, M., and M. Solomonov. "The *Korenizatsiya* of the National School: Results of the Investigation of the National School." In *The Nationalities Problem and Soviet Administration. Selected Readings on the Development of Soviet Nationalities Policies*, edited by Rudolf Schlesinger, translated by W. W. Gottlieb, 204–11. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956.
- Nikiforova, Larisa D. "Orël kak universal'nyy simvol dukhovnoy traditsii buryat," in *Doklady i tezisi Mezhdunarodnogo simpoziuma "Buryat-mongoly nakamune III tysyacheletiya: opyt kochevoy tsivilizatsii, Rossiya-Vostok-Zapad v sud'be naroda"*, 24–28 avgusta 1997g., edited by Irina S. Urbanayeva, Larisa D. Nikiforova and S. D. Batomunkuyev, 90–92. Ulan-Ude: BNTs, 1997.
- Nimayev, Daba D. *Problemy etnogeneza buryat*. Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1988.
- . "Kakova rol' tungusskikh plemen v protsesse slozheniya buryat?" In *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 1, edited by Taras M. Mikhaylov, 46–48. Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1990.
- Nanzatov, Bair Z. "K etnogenezu buryat po materialam etnonimii." In *Narody i kul'tury Sibiri. Vzaimodeystviye kak faktor formirovaniya i modernizatsiya*, issue 2, edited by Mikhail G. Turov, 28–48. Irkutsk: Irkutskiy Mezhhregional'nyy institut obshchestvennykh nauk, 2003.
- Natsov, Genin-Darma. *Materialy po istorii i kul'ture Buryat*, part 1. Ulan-Ude: BNTS SO RAN, 1995.
- Nomogoyeva, Viktoriya V. "Iz istorii bor'by s religiyey v Buryatii v 1920–1939-e gg." In *Tezisi i doklady Mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-teoreticheskoy konferentsii "Banzarovskiy chteniya 2" posvyashchennoy 175-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya Dorzhi Banzarova*, edited by B. V. Banzarov, L. V. Kuras, and V. Ts. Naydakov, 79–81. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs, 1997.
- . "Buryatiya v XVII–XVIII vekakh." In *Istoriya Buryatii s drevneyshikh vremen do nachala XX veka*, edited by Yefrem Ye. Tarmakhanov, 74–101, Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009.
- Norbeck, Edward. "The Study of Play—Johan Huizinga and Modern Anthropology." In *The Study of Play: Problems and Prospects*, edited by David F. Lancy and Allan Tindall, 13–22. West Point: Leisure Press, 1977.
- Ocherki istorii kul'tury Buryatii*, vol. 2, edited by Dashi D. Lubsanov et al. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1974.
- Ochirov, Pamazhap T. *Zemlya mergenov*. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'skiy dom "Buryaad unen", 2003.

- Ochirova, G. N. “‘Atsagatskaya letopis’” o poyezdke delegatsii khori-buryat v Moskvu v 1702–1703 gg.” In *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 1, edited by Yefgeniy M. Yegorov et al., 63–66. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2001.
- Okladnikov, Aleksey P. *Ocherki iz istorii zapadnykh buryat-mongolov*. Leningrad: Sotsekgiz, 1937.
- . “K voprosu o proiskhozhdenii i meste luka v istorii kul’tury.” In *Kratkiye soobshcheniya o dokladakh i polevykh issledovaniyakh instituta istorii material’noy kul’tury*, issue 5, 17–22. Moskva: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1940.
- . “Ancient Population of Siberia and its Culture.” In *The Peoples of Siberia*, edited by Maksim G. Levin and Leonid P. Potapov, 13–98. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- . *Petroglify Baykala: Pamyatniki drevney kul’tury narodov Sibiri* [résumé in English]. Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1974.
- Okladnikov, Aleksey P., and Vera D. Zaporozhskaya. *Petroglify Zabaykal’ya*. Part 2. Leningrad: Nauka, 1970.
- Ol’denburg, Sergey F., and Sergey I. Rudenko. *Ob’yasnitel’naya zapiska k etnograficheskoy karte Sibiri*. Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1929.
- Oorzhak, Kherel-ool Dazhy-Namchalovich. *Istoriya razvitiya fizicheskoy kul’tury i sporta v Tuve do 1945 goda*. Kyzyl: 1994.
- Oorzhak, Sergey Y. *Khuresh—filosofiya pobedy*. Kyzyl: Platina, 2008.
- Parry, S. J. “Hegemony and Sport.” In *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, edited by William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier, 431–42. Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1988.
- Parshin, V. *Poyezdka v zabaykal’skiy kray*. Part One. Moskva: 1844.
- Pavlinskaya, Larisa P. *Buryaty. Ocherki etnicheskoy istorii (XVII–XIX vv.)*. Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel’stvo “Evropeyskiy Dom,” 2008.
- Pegg, Carole. *Mongolian Music, Dance, and Oral Narrative: Performing Diverse Identities*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001.
- Petrov, Petar. “National Styles of Wrestling in the Soviet Union and the Post-Soviet States: Political and Sociocultural Aspects of Their Development and Use.” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, 4 (2014): 405–22.

- Piaget, Jean. *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*. Translated by C. Gattegno and F. M. Hodgson. London: William Heinemann, 1951. French original: *La formation du symbole chez l'enfant; imitation, jeu et rêve, image et représentation*. Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1945.
- Plakhotnichenko, Taras V. "Buryatskiy luk." [www.atarn.org/mongolian/buryat\\_bow\\_r.htm](http://www.atarn.org/mongolian/buryat_bow_r.htm). Accessed January 12, 2014.
- Poppe, Nicholas. *The Heroic Epic of the Khalkha Mongols*. Translated from the Russian by John Krueger, D. Montgomery, and M. Walter. Second edition. Bloomington: Mongolia Society, 1979.
- Potantin, Grigoriy N. *Ocherki severo-zapadnoy Mongolii. Rezul'taty puteshestviya, ispolnennogo 1876–1877 godakh*. Volume 2. Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografiya V. Kirshbauma, 1881.
- Potanina, Aleksandra V. *Rasskazy o buryatakh, ikh vere i obychayakh*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Moskva: Tipografiya K. L. Men'shova, 1912.
- Pozdnyakov, N. "Narodnyy prazdnik Mongolii." *Nauka i religiya* 7 (1961): 84–85.
- Pykin, Vasiliy M., ed. *Istoriya komsomola Buryatii. Dokumenty, fakti, imena. 1920–1991*. Book 1. 1920–1945gg. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2002.
- Randalov, Yuriy B. "Obshchestvennyye prazdniki v buryatskikh ulusakh." In *Voprosy preodoleniya perezhitkov proshlogo v bytu i soznanii lyudey i stanovleniya novykh obychayev i traditsii u narodov Sibiri*, vol. 2, 49–53. Ulan-Ude: SO AN SSSR, BION, 1966.
- . *Sotsialisticheskoye preobrazovaniye khozyaystva, byta i kul'tury buryatskogo ulusa za gody Sovetskoy vlasti (1917–1961gg.)* Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1967.
- . "K voprosu o formirovanii novykh obshchestvennykh prazdnikov v buryatskikh kolkhoznykh ulusakh." In *Etnograficheskiy sbornik*, vol. 5, 16–23. Ulan-Ude: 1969.
- Randalov, Yuriy B., E. O. Dobolova, I. A. Malanov, and N. B. Dondubon. *Maloye selo Buryatii: shkola, intellektual'noye i fizicheskoye razvitiye detey: opyt sotsiolog i sotsiopsikholog*. Ulan-Ude, BNTs SO RAN, 1993.

- Raschke, Manfred G. "New Studies in Roman Commerce with the East." In *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, Band II, 9, 2, *Politische Geschichte: Provinzen und Randvölker: Mesopotamien, Armenien, Iran, Südarabien, Rom und der Ferne Osten*, edited by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, 604–1378. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978.
- Rashid ad-Din. *Sbornik letopisej*. Vol. 1, book 1. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1952.
- Reller, Gisela. *Zwischen Weißem Meer und Baikalsee. Bei den Burjaten, Adygen und Kareliern*. Berlin: Neues Leben, 1981.
- Reshetnikov, Anatoliy F., and Zinaida I. Rabetskaya. "Istoricheskiy put' vzniknoveniya i razvitiya natsional'noy bor'by na osnove petroglifov baykal'skogo regiona." In *Vestnik Buryatskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, issue 8, edited by D. N. Garmayeva, 213–16. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2007.
- Riasanovsky, Nicholas V. *A History of Russia*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Riordan, James. *Sport in Soviet Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and the USSR*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- . "Sport and Communism—on the Example of the USSR." *Sport, Culture and Ideology*, edited by Jennifer Hargreaves, 213–31. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.
- Roberts, John M., Malcolm J. Arth, and Robert R. Bush. "Games in Culture." *American Anthropologist* 61, 4 (1959): 597–605.
- Roberts, John M., and Brian Sutton-Smith. "Cross-Cultural and Psychological Study of Games." *Behavior Science Notes* 3 (1966): 131–44.
- Royce, Joseph. "Play in Violent and Non-Violent Cultures." *Anthropos* 75, 5/6 (1980): 799–822.
- Rumyantsev, Georgiy N., ed. *Opisaniye o bratskikh tatarakh, sochinennoye morskogo korabel'nogo flota shtyurmanom ranga kapitana Mikhailom Tatarinovym*. Ulan-Ude: Tipografiya Minkul'tury BMASSR, 1958.
- Rupen, Robert A. "The Buriat Intelligentsia." *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15, 3 (May 1956): 383–98.
- . *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1964.

- Sagaleyev, A. S., K. V. Baldayev, A. Ye. Pavlov, and Vladimir A. Fomin. “Sistema “devyat’ nauk muzhchiny”—traditsionnoye sredstvo trudovogo i fizicheskogo vospitaniya buryat.” In *“Biyeiyn tamir, sport-shinechleliyn arga zam” Onol-praktikiyn olon ulsyn бага khurlyn tezisiyn emkhetgel*, 8–10. Ulaanbaatar: 1997.
- Sagaleyev, A. S., K. V. Baldayev, D. V. Tsybikov, and B. V. Dagbayev. “Buryatskaya shkola vol’noi bor’by: dostizheniya i problemy.” In *Fizicheskaya kul’tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost’, perspektivy (materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii)*, edited by S. V. Manturov and Vladimir A. Fomin, 38–40. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’sstvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998.
- Sagaleyev, A. S., K. V. Baldayev, D. V. Tsybikov, and B. V. Dagbayev. “Buryatskaya shkola vol’noy bor’by: dostizheniya i problemy.” In *Fizicheskaya kul’tura i sport: istoriya, sovremennost’, perspektivy: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, edited by Semën V. Manturov, 38–40. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’sstvo Buryatskogo gosuniversiteta, 1998.
- Salamone, Frank. “Religion as Play—Bori, a Friendly ‘Witchdoctor’.” In *The Study of Play: Problems and Prospects*, edited by David F. Lancy and Allan Tindall, 158–67. West Point: Leisure Press, 1977.
- Salter, Michael A. “Preface.” In *Play: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Michael A. Salter, 3. West Point: Leisure Press, 1978.
- Sandanov, Boris D. “Buryatskiye natsional’nyye vidy sporta.” *Teoriya i praktika fizicheskoy kul’tury* 2 (1964): 56–59.
- . *Surkharban*. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel’sstvo, 1964.
- . “Surkharban—massovyy sportivnyy prazdnik buryatskogo naroda.” In *Voprosy preodoleniya perezhitkov proshlogo v bytu i soznanii lyudey i stanovleniya novykh obychayev i traditsii u narodov Sibiri*, vol. 2, 92–94. Ulan-Ude: 1966.
- . *Fizicheskaya kul’tura i sport v Buryatii*. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel’sstvo, 1968.
- . *Eryn gurban naadan (Tri igry muzhey)*. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel’sstvo, 1993.
- Sanders, Alan J. K. *Historical Dictionary of Mongolia*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1996.
- Sands, Robert R. *Sport Ethnography*. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2002.
- . “Anthropology Revisits Sport through Human Movement.” In *The Anthropology of Sport and Human Movement: A Biocultural Perspective*, edited by Robert R. Sands and Linda R. Sands, 5–37. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010.

- Sands, Robert R., and Linda R. Sands. "Preface." In *The Anthropology of Sport and Human Movement: A Biocultural Perspective*, edited by Robert R. Sands and Linda R. Sands, vii–ix. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010.
- Sanzhiyev, Garmazhap L. "Prisoyedineniye Buryatii k rossiyskomu gosudarstvu i ego istoricheskoye znachenie." In *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 4, edited by V. M. Alekseyeva et al., 24–31. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2003.
- Sanzhiyeva, T. Ye. "Ustanovleniye Sovetskoy vlasti v Buryatii." Chapter 1 in *Istoriya Buryatii s nachala XX do nachala XXI veka*, edited by Yefrem Ye. Tarmakhanov, 6–21. Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009.
- . "Obrazovaniye Buryat-Mongol'skoy avtonomnoy sovetskoy sotsialisticheskoy respubliki. Vosstanovleniye narodnogo khozyaystva v usloviyakh NEP." Chapter 2 in *Istoriya Buryatii s nachala XX do nachala XXI veka*, edited by Yefrem Ye. Tarmakhanov, 22–36. Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009.
- Schmutz, Stephan. *Spiele als Medien der Friedenspädagogik*. München: Grin, 2004.
- Schorkowitz, Dittmar. "The Orthodox Church, Lamaism, and Shamanism among the Buriats and Kalmyks, 1825–1925." In *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, edited by Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, 201–25. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- . *Staat und Nationalitäten in Russland. Der Integrationsprozess der Burjaten und Kalmücken, 1822–1925*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2001.
- Schultz, Emily A., and Robert H. Lavenda. *Cultural Anthropology: A Perspective on the Human Condition*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Schwartzman, Helen B. *Transformations: The Anthropology of Children's Play*. New York: Plenum Press, 1978.
- The Secret History of the Mongols: The Life and Times of Chinggis Khan*. Translated, annotated, and with an introduction by Urgunge Onon. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Semjonow, Jurij N. *Sibirien. Schatzkammer des Ostens*, Wien: Econ, 1975.
- Sendlak, Peter. "Leibesübungen und Sport in der Sowjetunion." In *Geschichte der Leibesübungen*, vol. 4, edited by Horst Ueberhorst, 64–122. Berlin: Bartels- und Wernitz-Verlag, 1972.
- Shagdaron, Lubsan D., and Konstantin M. Cheremisov. *Buryaad-orod toli. Buryatsko-russkiy slovar'*. 2 volumes. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2010.

- Shagdaron, S.-D., and B.-D. Ochirov. "Igry i uveseleniya aginskikh buryat." *Zapiski Imperatorskago Russkago Geograficheskago obshchestva po otdeleniyu etnografii* 34 (1909): 465–82.
- Shagdurova, Irina N., and Yuriy B. Sandanov. "Buryatiya v XIX veke." In *Istoriya Buryatii s drevneyshikh vremen do nachala XX veka*, edited by Yefrem Ye. Tarmakhanov, 102–32, Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009.
- . "Buryatiya v nachale XX veka." In *Istoriya Buryatii s drevneyshikh vremen do nachala XX veka*, edited by Yefrem Ye. Tarmakhanov, 133–53, Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009.
- Shchapov, Afanasiy P. "Sibirskoye obshchestvo do Speranskago." In *Sochineniya A. P. Shchapova*. Issue 3, 643–717. Sankt-Peterburg: Knigoizdatel'stvo M. V. Pirozhkova, 1908.
- Shekherova, O. N., and A. P. Fedorova. "O roli traditsionnykh buryatskikh prazdnikov v sokhranении natsional'nykh kul'turnykh traditsiy." In *Problemy razvitiya muzeyev pod otkrytym nebom v sovremennykh usloviyakh*, 151–53. Irkutsk: 1995.
- Shornikov, N. "Metkaya strela." *Fizkul'tura i sport* 10 (1951): 34–35.
- Sipes, Richard G. "War, Sports and Aggression: An Empirical Test of Two Rival Theories." *American Anthropologist* 75, 1 (1973): 64–86.
- Skrynnikova, Tat'yana D. "Surkharban—interpretatsiya znacheniya ponyatiya." In *Tsybikovskiy chteniya – 6: Problemy istoriya i kul'tury mongol'skikh narodov: Tezisy dokladov i soobshcheniy*, 39–41. Ulan-Ude: 1993.
- Skrynnikova, Tatiana, and Darima Amogolonova. "Stories and Symbols of the Post-Soviet Buryat National Revival." Chapter 2 in *Dilemmas of Diversity after the Cold War: Analyses of "Cultural Difference" by U.S. and Russia-Based Scholars*, edited by Michele Rivkin-Fish and Elena Trubina, 80–112. Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2010.
- Snelling, John. *Buddhism in Russia. The Story of Agvan Dorzhiev, Lhasa's Emissary to the Tsar*. Shaftesbury: Element, 1993.
- Sogawa, Tsuneo. Review of *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*, edited by Kendall Blanchard and Alyce Taylor Cheska (South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey, 1985). *Asian Folklore Studies* 48, 2 (1989): 300–302.
- Spencer, Herbert. *The Principles of Psychology*. 2 volumes. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873.

- Spencer, Jonathan. "Symbolic Anthropology." In *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, edited by Jonathan Spencer and Alan Barnard, 535–39. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Ssanang Ssetsen Chungtaidschi. *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen und ihres Fürstenhauses*, übersetzt und herausgegeben von Isaac Jacob Schmidt. St. Petersburg: N. Gretschi, 1829.
- Stakheyeva, Natal'ya N. *Staroobryadchestvo Vostochnoy Sibiri v XVII – nachale XX vv.* Avtoreferat dissertatsii. Irkutsk 1998.
- Stevens, Phillips. "Laying the Groundwork for an Anthropology of Play." In *Studies in the Anthropology of Play: Papers in the Memory of Allan Tindall*, edited by Phillips Stevens, Jr., 238–47. West Point: Leisure Press, 1977.
- Strutt, Joseph. *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*. A new edition, much enlarged and corrected by J. Charles Cox. London: Methuen & Co, 1801.
- Stumpf-Frederickson, Florence. "Sports and the Cultures of Man." In *Sport, Culture and Society*, edited by John W. Loy and Gerald S. Kenyon, 87–100. London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969.
- Sutton-Smith, Brian. "Towards an Anthropology of Play." In *Studies in the Anthropology of Play: Papers in the Memory of Allan Tindall*, edited by Phillips Stevens, Jr., 222–31. West Point: Leisure Press, 1977.
- . *Die Dialektik des Spiels: eine Theorie des Spielens, der Spiele und des Sports*. Schorndorf: Hofmann, 1978.
- Sutton-Smith, Brian, and John M. Roberts. "The Cross-Cultural and Psychological Study of Games." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 6 (1971): 79–87.
- Svinin, Vladimir V. "Osnovnye etapy drevney istorii naseleniya poberezh'ya ozera Baykal." In *Drevnyaya istoriya narodov yuga Vostochnoy Sibiri*, 7–24, Irkutsk 1974.
- Szóllősy, Gábor. "Mennyivel voltak jobb íjaik a honfoglaló magyaroknak, mint a korabeli Európa más népeinek? *Keletkutatás* (1995/ősz): 37–51.
- Taube, Erika. "Einige mongolische Unterhaltungsspiele." In *Jahrbuch des Museums für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig*, vol. 24, 56–65. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1967.
- . "Die drei Wettspiele der Männer. Über die traditionellen Sportarten der Mongolen." *Altertum* 22, 2 (1976): 99–106.



- Titov, I. Ye. *Konskiye bega v vostochnom Zabaykal'ye*. Irkutsk: Izdaniye Vostochno-Sibirskogo Otdela Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva, 1924. Also published in *Sibirskaya Zhivaya Starina*, issue 2 (Irkutsk: 1924), 38–54.
- Toboyev, Tugulder. “Proshlaya istoriya khorinskikh i aginskikh buryat. [1863]” In *Buryatskiye letopisi*, edited by Shirap B. Chimitdorzhiev and Tsymzhit P. Vanchikova, 5–35. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskiy institut obshchestvennykh nauk SO RAN, 1995.
- Tokarev, Sergey A. “On the Origin of the Buryat Nation.” In *Studies in Siberian Ethnogenesis*, edited by Henry N. Michael, 102–18, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962. Translation of Sergey A. Tokarev, “O proiskhozhdenii buryatskogo naroda,” *Sovetskaya etnografiya* 2 (1953): 37–52.
- Trebukhovskiy, Pëtr F. *Sur-kharban balaganskikh buryat v proshlom i nastoyashchem*. Irkutsk: Vlast' Truda, 1927. Also published in *Buryatovedcheskiy sbornik* 3–4 (1927): 74–79.
- Tsybikdorzhiev, Dorzho V. “Onim kak glavnyy simvol cheloveka, etnosa i gosudarstva u mongolov.” In *Doklady i teziy Mezhdunarodnogo simpoziuma „Buryat-mongoly nakamune III tsysacheletiya: opyt kochevoy tsivilizatsii, Rossiya-Vostok-Zapad v sud'be naroda”, (24–28 avgusta 1997g.*, edited by Irina S. Urbanayeva, Larisa D. Nikiforova, and S. D. Batomunkuyev, 17–24. Ulan-Ude: BNTs: 1997.
- . “Istoriko-etnograficheskiye aspekty natsional'noy bor'by mongolov (boyevoye iskusstvo, epos i mif).” In *Mongolovednyye issledovaniya*, issue 3, 59–73. Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo BNTs SO RAN, 2000.
- Tsybikdorzhieva, V., and D. Tsybikdorzhieva. “Gramota-ukaz Petra I i pravo buryat na svoe ‘porodnye’ zemli.” In *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 4, edited by V. M. Alekseyeva et. al., 38–44. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2003.
- Tsybiktarov, Aleksandr D. “Buryatiya v epokhu kamnya, bronzy i rannego zheleza.” In *Istoriya Buryatii s drevneyshikh vremen do nachala XX veka*, edited by Yefrem. Ye. Tarmakhanov, 5–45. Ulan-Ude: Belig, 2009.
- Tugutov, Iosif Ye. *Material'naya kul'tura buryat*. Ulan-Ude: BKNII SO AN SSSR, 1958.
- . *Igry v obshchestvennoy zhizni buryat*. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1989.
- . *Buryatskiye narodnyye igry*. Ulan-Ude: Belig, 1994.
- Turner, Victor “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: an Essay in Comparative Symbolology.” *Rice University Studies* 60, 3 (1974): 53–92.

- . “Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas.” In *Play, Games and Sports in Cultural Contexts*, edited by Janet C. Harris and Roberta J. Park, 327–59. Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1983.
- Turunov, Anatoliy N. *Proshloye buryat-mongol'skoy narodnosti*. Irkutsk 1922.
- Tylor, Edward B. “On the Game of Patolli in Ancient Mexico, and its Probably Asiatic Origin.” *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 8 (1878): 116–31.
- . “The History of Games.” *The Fortnightly Review* 25 (1879): 735–49.
- . *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization*. New York: Appleton, 1881.
- . “On American Lot-Games, as Evidence of Asiatic Intercourse before the Time of Columbus.” *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* 9, supplement (1896): 55–67.
- Ulf, Christoph. “Sport bei den Naturvölkern.” In *Der Sport bei den Völkern der Alten Welt: eine Einführung* by Ingomar Weiler, 14–52. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981.
- Ulymzhiyev, D. V. “Rasskazhite o pervom buryatskom revolyutsionere Ts. Ts. Ranzhurove,” in *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 2, edited by N. V. Kim, 120–22. Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1991.
- UNESCO *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*. <http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/>. Accessed March 31, 2015.
- Urchanova, Rimma. “Die nationale Frage in Burjatien: gegenwärtige Retrospektive.” In *Nationalismus in den nationalen Gebietseinheiten*, vol. 3 of *Nationalismus im spät- und postkommunistischen Europa*, edited by Egbert Jahn, 188–206. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008.
- Urzhanov, A. D. “Tezisi leksii prof. G. Ts. Tsybikova o natsional'nykh prazdnikakh buryat.” In *K stoletiyu so dnya rozhdeniya professora G. Ts. Tsybikova*, edited by A. P. Okladnikov, 200–205. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1976.
- “V kakoy stepeni buryaty prinyali uchastiye v pervoy rossiyskoy revolyutsii?” In *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 2, edited by N. V. Kim, 117–18 (name of author not given). Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1991.
- Vatanabe, Khibi. *Obryady i politicheskaya integratsiya u buryat*. Tokio: 1994.

- Veit, Veronika. "Das Pferd—Alter Ego des Mongolen?" In *Fragen der mongolischen Heldendichtung*, Teil 3, edited by Walther Heissig, 58–88. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1985.
- Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross, Vesvolod N., V. S. Kovaleva, and Ye. I. Stepanova. *Igry narodov SSSR*. Moskva: Akademiya, 1933.
- Vyatkina, Kapitolina V. "Kul't konya u mongol'skikh narodov." *Sovetskaya etnografiya* 6 (1968): 117–22.
- . *Ocherki kul'tury i byta buryat*. Leningrad: Nauka, 1989.
- Weule, Karl. "Ethnologie des Sports: der Sport der Natur- und Urvölker, exotische Sports." In *Geschichte des Sports aller Völker und Zeiten*, edited by G. A. E. Bogeng, vol. 1, 1–75. Leipzig, Seemann, 1926.
- Wittfogel, Karl A., and Fêng Chia-Shêng. *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907–1125)*. Vol. 36 of *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*. New York: Lancaster Press, 1949.
- Yegorov, Yefgeniy M. "Istoricheskoye znachenie pokhoda khori-buryat 1702–1703 gg. k Petru I." In *Narody Buryatii v sostave Rossii: ot protivostoyaniya k soglasiyu (300 let Ukazu Petra I)*, part 1, edited by Yefgeniy M. Yegorov, 5–16, Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2001.
- Yelayev, Aleksandr A. *Buryatskiy narod: stanovleniye, razvitiye, samoopredeleniye*. Moskva: 2000.
- Yumsunov, Vandan. "Istoriya proiskhozhdeniya odinnadtsati khorinskikh rodov. [1875]" In *Buryatskie letopisi*, edited by Shirap B. Chimitdorzhiev and Tsymzhit P. Vanchikova, 36–102. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskiy institut obshchestvennykh nauk SO RAN, 1995.
- Zalkind, Yefgeniy M., ed. *Ocherki istorii kul'tury Buryatii*. Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1972.
- Zaytsev, L. A. "Kto, krome D. Banzarova, otnositsya k pervym deyatelyam prosveshcheniya, kul'tury i nauki iz buryat?" In *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 2, edited by N. V. Kim, 38–39, Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1991.
- Zhalsarayev, Anatoliy D. *Vremya. Sobytiya, Lyudi*. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2011.

- Zhambalova, Sesegma G. "Oblavnaya okhota buryat kak otrazheniye ranney formy sotsial'noy organizatsii." In *Buryaty*, edited by Lyubov L. Abayeva and Natal'ya L. Zhukovskaya, 62–73. Moskva: Nauka, 2004.
- Zhukovskaya, Natalya L. "Religion and Ethnicity in Eastern Russia, Republic of Buryatia: A Panorama of the 1990s." *Central Asian Survey* 14, 1 (1995): 25–42.
- Zhukovskaya, Natal'ya L. *Kategorii i simbolika traditsionnoy kul'tury mongolov*. Moskva: Nauka, 1988.
- . "Na perekrestke trekh religii: Iz istorii dukhovnoy zhizni buryatskogo sela Tory." In *Shamanizm i rannye religioznye predstavleniya*, edited by Dmitriy A. Funk, 76–87. Moskva: Institut etnologii i antropologii RAN, 1995.
- , ed. *Istoriko-kul'turnyy atlas Buryatii*. Moskva: Dizayn. Informatsiya. Kartografiya, 2001.
- Zimin, Zhan A. *Istoriya Alarskogo rayona*. Irkutsk 1995.
- Zoriktuyev, Bulat R. "Vzaimootnosheniya plemen Pribaykal'ya i Mongolii v epokhu Chingis-khana." In *Taynaya istoriya mongolov: istochnikovedeniye, istoriya, filologiya*, edited by B. Z. Bazarova and Prokopi B. Konovalov, 90–95, Novosibirsk 1995.
- Zoriktuyev, Bulat R.-Kh. "Imeyetsya li etnicheskaya i kul'turnaya svyaz' mezhdru kurykanami i buryatami?" Onvet 1 na vopros no. 12 [First answer to question no. 12] in *Istoriya Buryatii v voprosakh i otvetakh*, issue 1, edited by Taras M. Mikhaylov, 39–40, Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo narodnogo obrazovaniya Buryatskoy ASSR, 1990.